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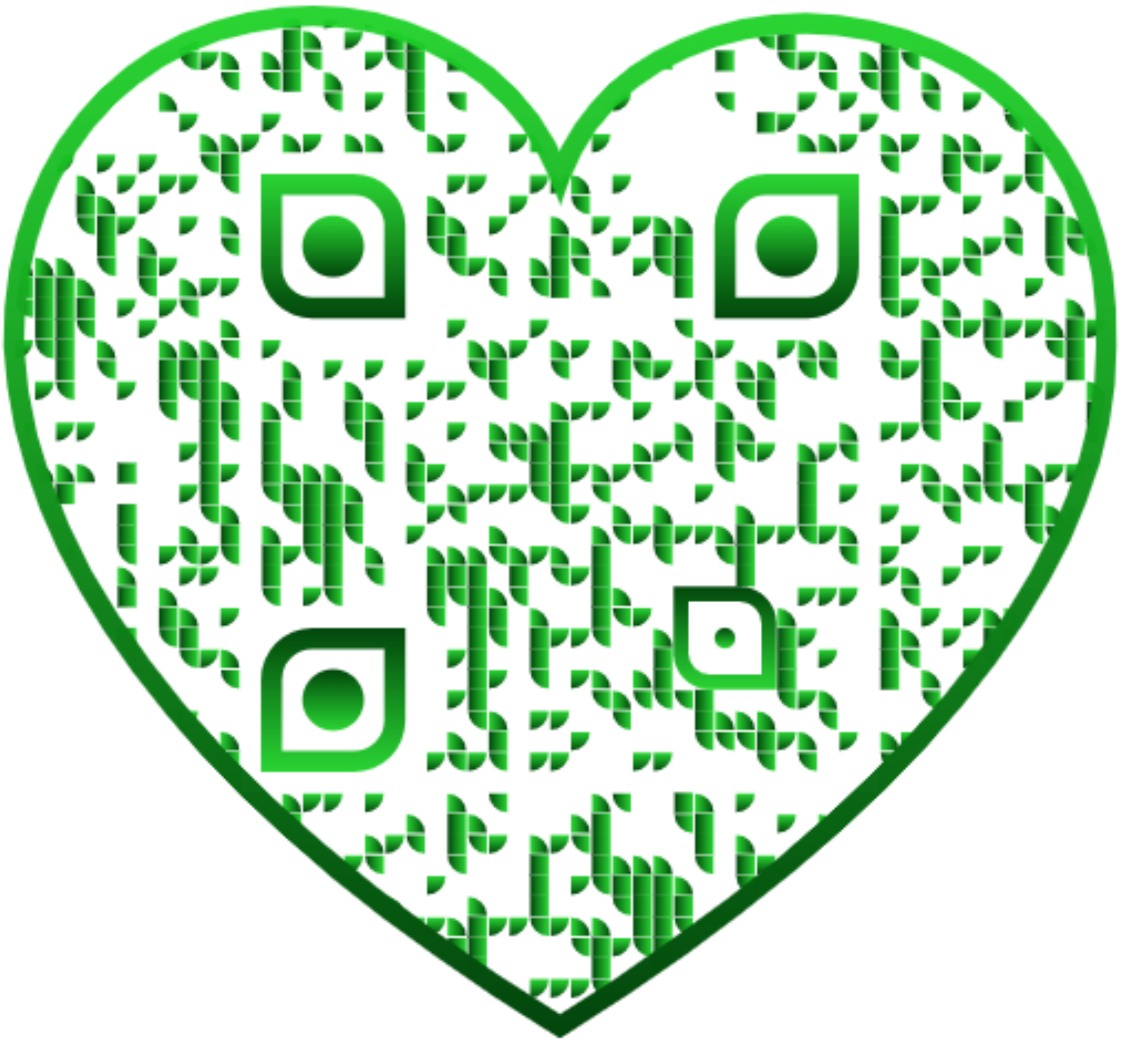

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Reach for the Sky...

People have been quick to call time on the electric guitar's pivotal role in popular culture of late, and it's true that in recent years the pop mainstream has been rather low on old-fashioned guitar heroes. But happily, every so often we're reminded that there's life in the old dog yet. Can anyone think of a new electric guitar in the digital age that's stirred things up quite as much as the instrument on this month's cover? Turn to p10 to find out what we think of the most talked-about guitar of the year.

While we're on the subject, all this talk of signature models made me return to that time-honoured fantasy... in the unlikely event of me ever reaching a suitable level of rock stardom, what would I want from a signature guitar? It turns out that it's a tough question to answer. I can probably tell you what I want from a signature guitar on a Tuesday. But what if I want to play something completely different on a Wednesday? The answer, as always, seems to be 'buy more guitars', but please do write in and let us know what your desert island instrument would be should that elusive endorsement deal ever come your way.

Finally, if you haven't already, please point your browser at www.youtube.com/theguitarmagazine and check out our rapidly growing YouTube channel packed with artist rig tours, gear demos, interviews and much more besides. We'll be uploading a regular stream of content throughout 2018, so make sure you hit that subscribe button to ensure that you don't miss a thing. In the meantime, enjoy the issue and I'll see you next month.

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p24

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for TV, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker

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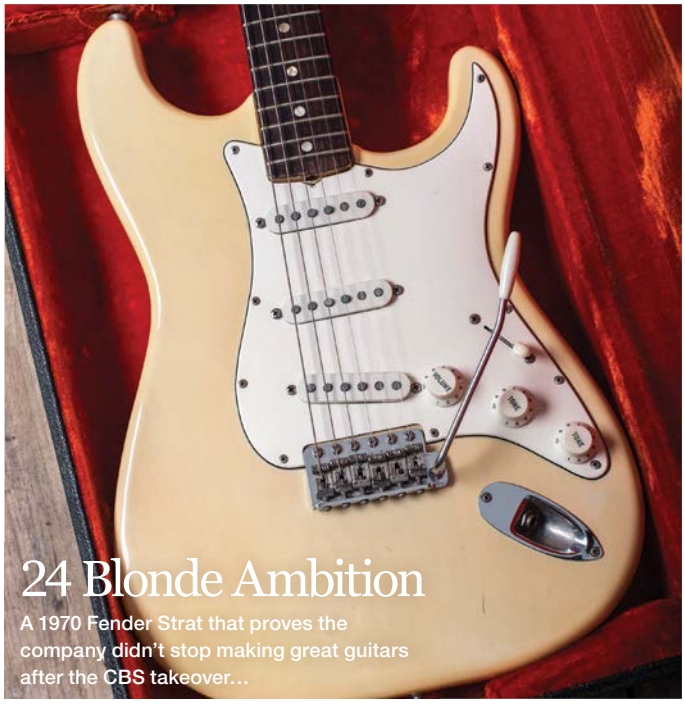
John Mayer's new PRS Silver Sky is 2018's hottest new guitar release – does the reality live up to the hype?



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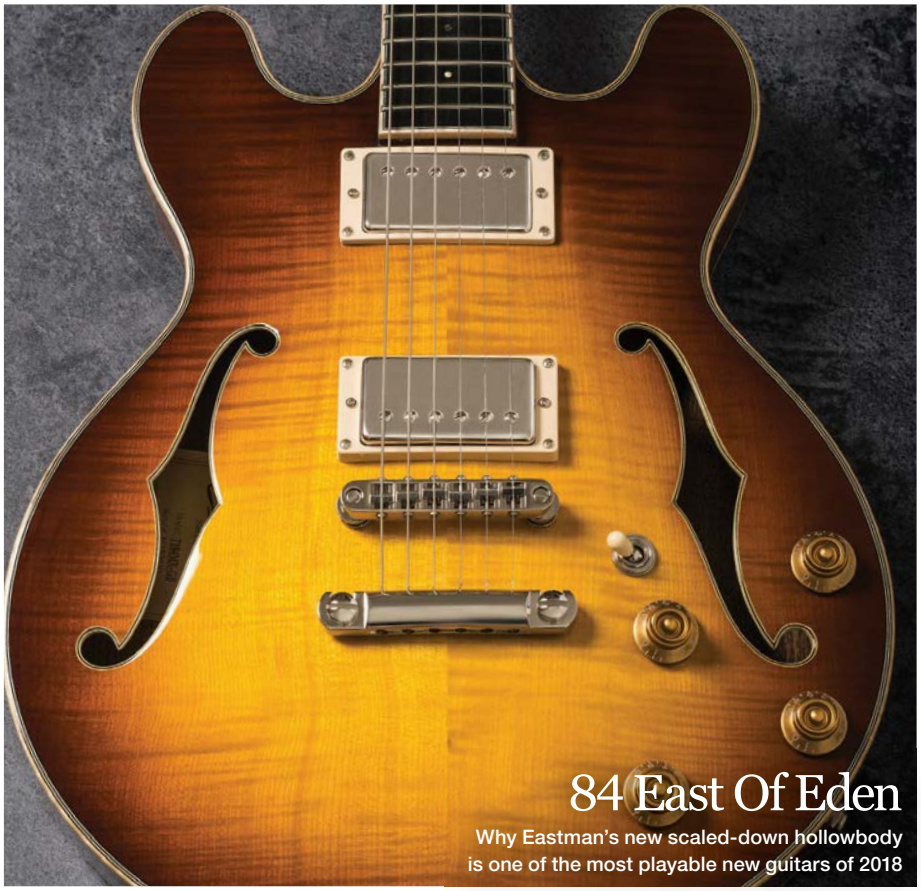

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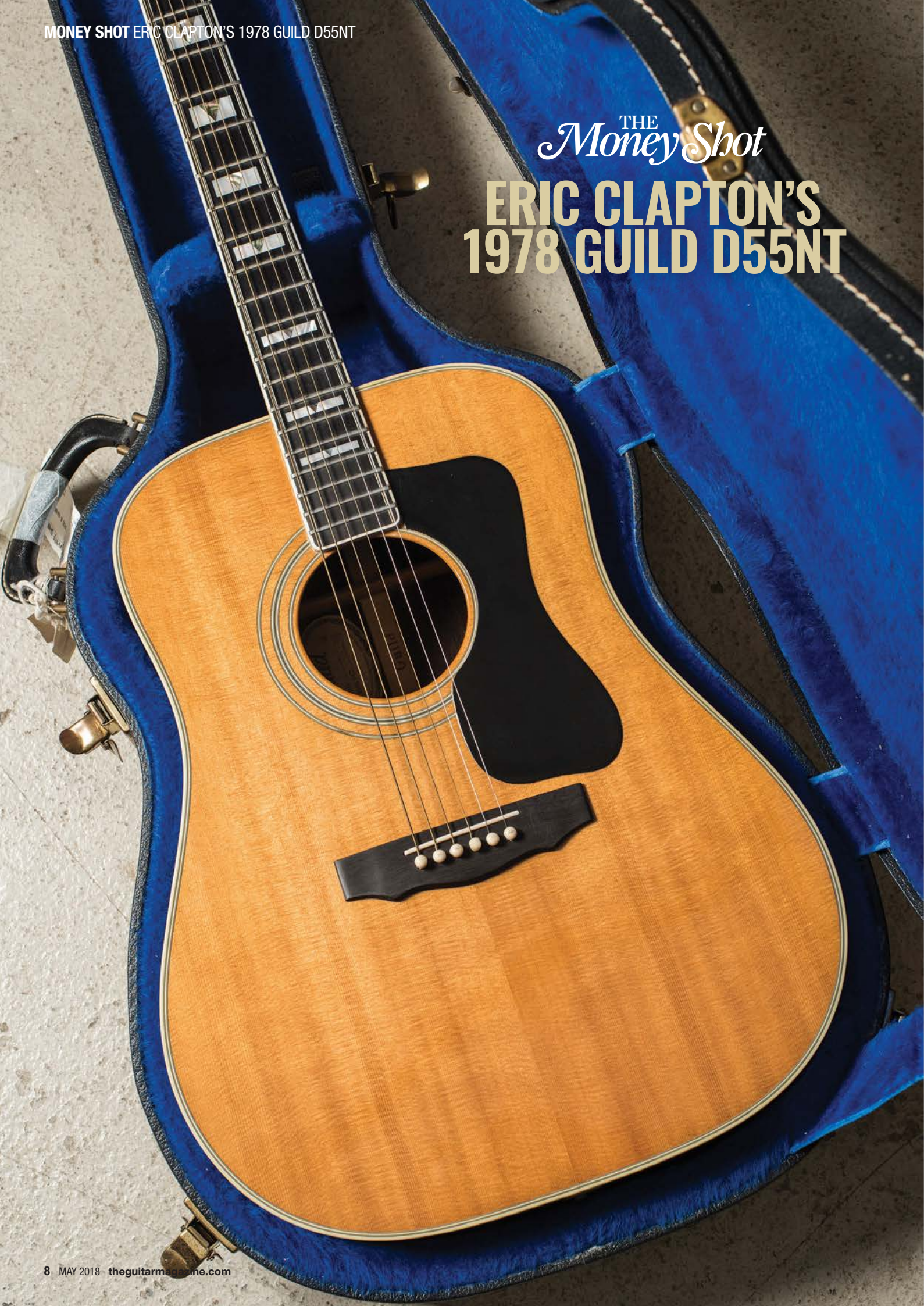


THE *Money Shot*

ERIC CLAPTON'S 1978 GUILD D55NT

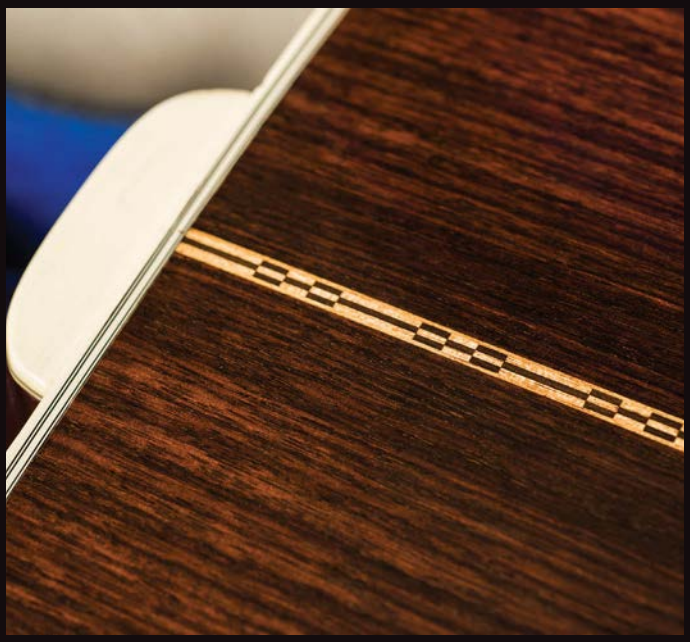
Eric Clapton has made a habit of auctioning off his old instruments to benefit various charitable causes over the years, and this is what happened to this beautiful 1978 Guild D55NT, which was owned by the guitar legend from new in '78 until it was sold at a charity auction benefiting Eric's Crossroads drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in 1999.

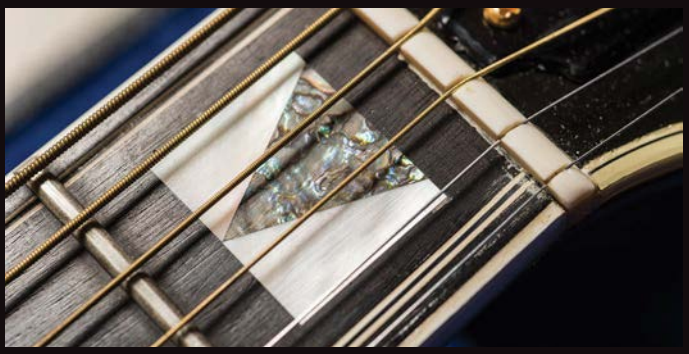
In the intervening period, however, this guitar was used by Clapton for recording and songwriting purposes – you can even see a cigarette burn in that classic bound Guild headstock from where Slowhand used to wedge his lit tabs between the strings while he would play.

Aside from the burn on the headstock, it's in remarkably good condition – the natural spruce top, rosewood back and sides, and the ebony fingerboard are all free of any major wear and tear.

We can't say how heavily Eric used the guitar in the 20 years he owned it, but it's undoubtedly an inspiring guitar. We were lucky enough to spend some time with it before it was sold at Gardiner Houlgate Auctions (guitar-auctions.co.uk), and we were blown away by its depth of tone in the short time we had with it.

Expected to fetch around £10,000, the Guild sold for a whopping £25,000 – a sound investment for sure, but a magical instrument, too.





SILVER SKY
JOHN MAYER MODEL

DEFYING GRAVITY

After two years of exhaustive R&D, March 2018 saw one of the industry's worst-kept secrets become the most talked-about guitar in recent history. Depending on whom you believe, John Mayer and Paul Reed Smith's Silver Sky is either 'the future of a classic design' or just another Strat copy with the 'wrong' headstock. Across the pages that follow, Chris Vinnicombe plays the guitar at the centre of an online storm and speaks to the man who brought John Mayer's vision to life...

In just 45 minutes the manufacturer's website receives almost a year's worth of traffic and buckles under the strain. Social media fizzes with love and hate, enthusiasm and disdain in equal measure. Sales outstrip initial projections to such a vast extent that employees will have to work around the clock to fulfil orders. It sounds like the combination of a new iPhone launch and a major election campaign but in reality, ladies and gentlemen, it's the announcement of a brand new electric guitar, right here in 2018.

But guitar heroes are dead in the water, right? Primitive instruments of wood and wire are consigned to history as glossy pop and R&B dominates the airwaves and programmed beats blast out of mobile telephones against the backdrop of the strobing clatter of subway cars. Right?

If that's the case, John Mayer didn't get the memo. And neither did his millions of online followers.

THE BACKSTORY

Let's rewind the tape for a moment or two and remind ourselves how we got here. Since the release of his debut LP *Room For Squares* in 2001, John Mayer has sold 10s of millions of albums, won seven Grammy Awards and received an incredible 19 nominations. His musical journey has seen him excel as an acoustic singer-songwriter and demonstrate breathtaking ability as a blues-rock guitarist, participating in a variety of genre-hopping collaborations along the way. For a man who only turned 40 in 2017 he's packed an awful lot in – and that's before you consider the forays into writing, stand up comedy, horology and plenty more besides.

The Connecticut-born Montana resident has been a dyed-in-the-wool Strat player for many years and his first signature Stratocaster was released in 2005. However, October 2014 saw Mayer's relationship with Fender hit the rocks. "Heads up to anyone thinking about owning my signature Fender Stratocaster," he tweeted. "They're no longer being made and I'm no longer a Fender artist."

It was a very public break up, but by 2015 he'd found a new collaborator in the shape of Paul Reed Smith. The first fruits of Mayer and Smith's relationship came in 2016 in the form of the Private Stock Super Eagle –

John Mayer puts the Silver Sky through its paces on stage

a super-exotic high-end model limited to just 100 pieces worldwide, and designed for use in Mayer's Dead & Company project, which saw the guitarist take the stage alongside former members of the Grateful Dead. January 2017 saw PRS and Mayer unveil the J-MOD 100 signature amp in front of a throng of journalists at the Winter NAMM show and then in June, the Private Stock Super Eagle II arrived with updated woods and aesthetics. The price tag was an eye-watering £10,995 and production was limited to just 120 instruments.

Both Super Eagle models are extraordinary guitars with interesting specifications including a 25.375-inch scale length, ultra-versatile switching and an onboard preamp. But all the while, Mayer and Smith were working on an electric guitar design that was more traditional, more accessible and with genuine mass market appeal.

Although the combination of photographs of prototypes being put through their paces at gigs, rogue news outlets breaking embargoes and Mayer himself teasing the instrument on social media meant that the public were primed for its release, when the PRS Silver Sky was officially unveiled to the world in early March it made the kind of waves that went beyond the wildest dreams of even the most ambitious marketing department. Time to open the commemorative hard case (in which the first 500 examples of this much talked-about guitar will make their way to market) and see what all the fuss is about.

THE GUITAR

In a 40-minute Instagram Live video that streamed in the days following the Silver Sky's launch, as well as providing an extensive demonstration of his new guitar's capabilities, Mayer remarked that he "had an idea for a guitar – and this goes back about 10 years – a guitar that is sort of the future of the classic design". First impressions of our review model, in its Tesla-inspired Horizon red metallic finish, are of an instrument that takes many cues from the Stratocaster, but also includes nods to modernity and several features that are synonymous with PRS.

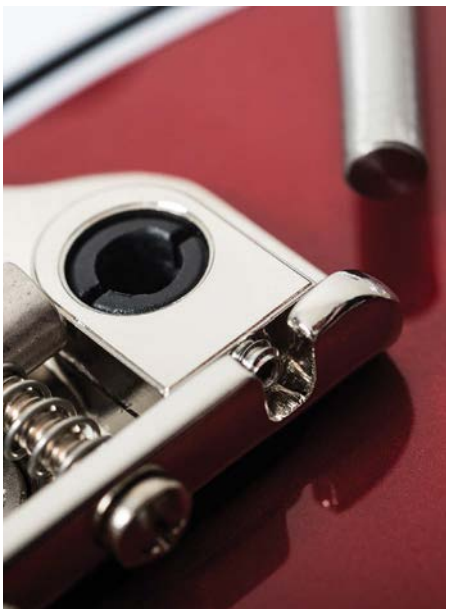
FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE OF AN INSTRUMENT THAT TAKES MANY CUES FROM VINTAGE STRATOCASTERS, BUT ALSO INCLUDES NODS TO MODERNITY

Of course, it's not the first time that Smith has designed a three-single coil, bolt-on neck, alder body electric, and in hindsight 2010's DC3 (whose ergonomic pickup selector switch tip survives on the Silver Sky) feels like an evolutionary step towards this much more Fender-like PRS. Mayer's own pre-CBS guitars were key reference points during the design process, so for the purposes of this review we compared the Silver Sky to a 1963 Stratocaster owned by a member of *The Guitar Magazine* team.

Weighing in at 7.4lbs, the Silver Sky is a little lighter than our 7.7lbs reference guitar, while the PRS has a slightly slimmer 215mm waist versus the Strat's 225mm. The 455mm body length of both guitars is approximately the same, while the body thickness of both tops out at 44.6mm. The Silver Sky's ribcage contour isn't as dramatic as the vintage instrument's, scooping out to a depth of around 24mm compared to the Strat's 18mm before the edge radius comes into play. The forearm chamfer is also less pronounced, with the PRS body reaching its full depth just past the strap button (which is the familiar PRS type that began life when Paul used Fender bass string trees found on his repair bench) while the Fender continues to widen up to a point in line with the centre of its volume knob.

The biggest departure at the body end of the equation is the scoop in the Silver Sky's treble horn, which aside from being a stamp of PRS identity on an otherwise very Strat-like body aids access all the way up to that 22nd fret and is even painted a subtly darker accent colour to make it stand out more. The heel is also more rounded and although there's a small gap between the body lip and the neck on the treble side of the pocket that it's possible to slide a piece of paper into, we've encountered monster-sounding vintage bolt-ons that have considerably bigger gaps around the neck join. When you remove the neck and scratchplate, other than a little bleed around the edges, there's no finish in the neck pocket or pickup and control routs, which should aid resonance. The body's finish is typically PRS and consists of a polyester base and acrylic urethane top coat, while the neck is finished in clear nitrocellulose.

Smith has described the Silver Sky's 635JM neck profile as "splitting the difference between a '63 and a '64 carve", but perhaps one of the most contentious aspects of the guitar as far as the online reaction to it is concerned is the 7.25-inch radius rosewood fingerboard with its Small Bird inlays. Early Silver Sky prototypes apparently featured 8.5 and 8.25-inch boards but Mayer eventually



settled on a vintage-style 7.25-inch curve. Although received wisdom suggests that the combination of a medium-low action and big string bends might lead to problems with fretting out in certain positions, thanks to PRS's approach to fret levelling, performance is trouble free, and even when we try to trip the guitar up with some huge bends, it doesn't blink. When we canvassed the opinion of highly technical players accustomed to much flatter 'boards, the Silver Sky didn't present any problems – blues-rockers certainly shouldn't have any trouble when bending strings here.

The Silver Sky apparently ships with some of the most specific set-up guidelines of any PRS to date, which includes the vibrato being set for downward travel only. This is intended to help sonically by coupling the bridge plate to the body when the bar isn't in use. PRS says: "By keeping the bridge in contact with the body, the guitar itself is acoustically louder, which improves the signal to noise ratio of the single-coil pickups." If you prefer a floating set-up then that's easily achievable too – we don't notice a significant increase in noise when putting his to the test, but the guitar possibly offers a little additional treble zing when configured this way. It's very subtle.

At the headstock end, there's a bone nut attached with hide glue, while the headstock shape itself went through "25 redraws", and PRS even approached external industrial design companies during the process. Mayer and Smith finally settled on a design that feels Strat-like in the area behind the nut, but offers optimal string length to aid tuning stability and road-friendly headstock-end adjustment for the double-action truss rod. It's very much still a PRS design, albeit one that's reversed to balance harmoniously with the body horns. The tuners blend vintage and modern as the closed-back units feature PRS's locking mechanism, while the guitar's 22 'Acoustic' frets are slightly larger than vintage Fullerton spec, but smaller in both height and width than the majority of other PRS electrics.

(Continued on p18)

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SILVER SKY THINKING

Paul Reed Smith gives us his perspective on the guitar that's set the internet ablaze

We caught up with Paul Smith at the European launch of the Silver Sky to find out more about a project that has been two years in the making and all-consuming for those involved. The result of so much perspiration is a guitar that even Smith himself struggles to stop playing. A big part of the appeal is undoubtedly down to the instrument's supremely comfortable, vintage-style neck.

"During the whole process the one thing that got me emotionally was I wrapped my hand around the neck and I went, 'That's the first time that's been tooled up in 50 years'," Paul enthuses. "That shape. That is a 1963 neck. Everybody who wraps their hand around it goes, 'I like that'. And I did too. When I felt the raw one I went, 'Oh my god…'"

The Silver Sky's 7.25-inch 'board radius has been the source of a great deal of debate among online commentators. We're curious to hear Smith's response to those dissenting voices. "When I listen to *Machine Gun* I don't hear any problem with Hendrix playing solos," Paul notes. "When Stevie Ray Vaughan was playing I don't hear any trouble. When John Mayer is playing *Gravity* I don't hear any trouble. You've gotta be kidding me!

"*Machine Gun* is some of the best electric guitar playing ever. I spent a year trying to learn to play that tune and it isn't what you think! I mean, Blackmore didn't sound bad! Mark Knopfler did okay on *Sultans Of Swing*! I don't hear it buzzing!"

All that said, he does acknowledge that when using a vintage-style 'board radius, "if the neck's not dead straight and the frets aren't dead level then there is a problem, but if you get the frets level, oh my god, it's just a whole different ballgame."

Does that mean that levelling the Silver Sky's frets takes longer than it would on a PRS with a flatter radius? "Yes and no," says Smith. "I spent more time training the fret leveller 'cause there's less fretwire. The natural inclination is to level them all the same, but you can't do that. You have to train somebody to work three times harder on one side than the other.

"We don't use a Plek machine, it's not our thing. As a matter of fact at one point they were telling people the only guitar that doesn't need a Plek machine is a PRS. The guy selling 'em was telling people that. But we're very careful. I use what I call a straight stick, it's an old-school method of levelling frets, it works like a charm, and we're very good at it. The frets are dead level. In order to do a good job levelling frets, first of all the neck's gotta be straight, a lot of people level the neck by levelling the frets."

> "What I wanted was that when John played it, he wouldn't have to look, he'd know exactly where he was"

PICKUP LINES

When it came to the voicing the 635JM pickups, although sounding like a "really good" pre-CBS Strat was part of the plan, it wasn't a simple matter of replication. "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result," says Paul. "You can't just wind 'em up the way the internet tells you to wind 'em up and think they are going to sound like that, that's not the way it works. We had to figure out what was going on and it's not simple. We have a machine that tells us what a pickup sounds like before we ever plug it in. I had the screens right, and they looked like the old ones, finally, and I plugged it in. When I heard it I went, 'Well, there it is'. I wasn't guessing any more.

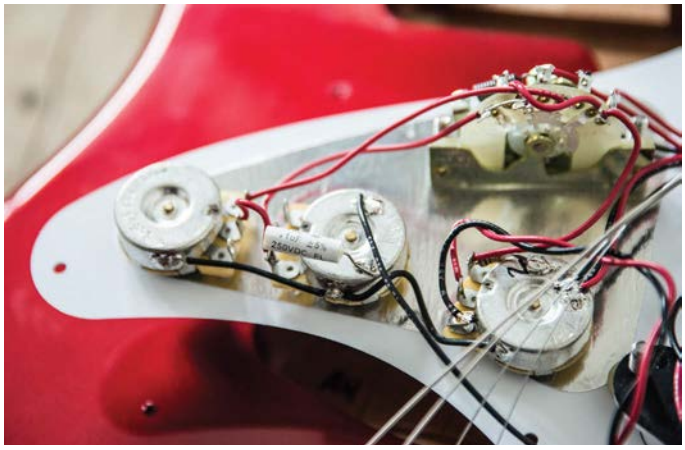
"On the old guitars it was a crapshoot. This is not a crapshoot. Now we have computerised winders and the engineering has been done so it sounds good. I made [the polepieces] staggered but not the way it would be for a wound G – I changed the staggering for modern strings and it didn't hurt anything. It has a plastic bobbin not fibreboard. When we were struggling with the pickups I suspected maybe it was the plastic bobbin but it ended up not being that at all. I don't hear a difference between the fibreboard and plastic bobbins. I do hear huge differences in the magnets, the wire gauge and other things. I like these pickups! I think they sound good."

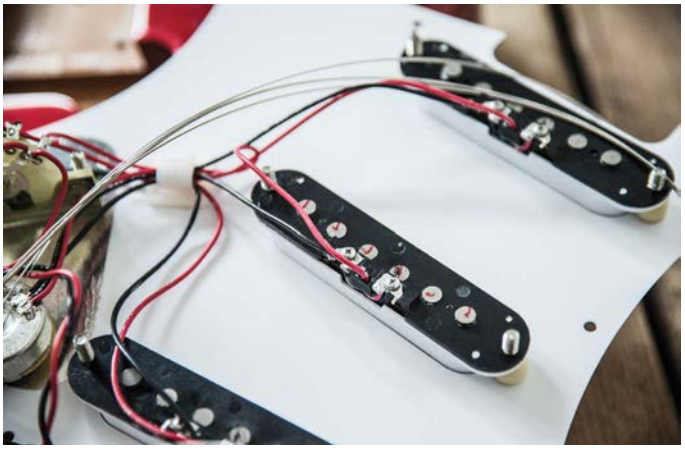
TAKE IT TO THE BRIDGE

All Silver Sky guitars ship with the Steel Tremolo bridge set flush to the body so that the vibrato arm only lowers pitch. Paul says that this isn't purely a set-up preference – it also helps minimise hum: "The guitar is a little louder [that way] and you need every dB of string volume and pickup volume in order to get the signal-to-noise ratio down. The louder the pickup is, the less the hum is."

The process also included other refinements that aimed to make the experience of playing a vintage-style bolt-on somewhat less of a white-knuckle ride. "The arm's higher so it doesn't hit the knob," Paul explains. "We have our version of these old saddles but with narrower string spacing. With the old ones the strings would hang off the side of the neck. It's wider than a regular PRS but narrower than the F-brand. We made the neck a little wider at the end and the right width at the nut. I didn't want the strings hanging off the edge of the neck. What I wanted was that when John played it, he wouldn't have to look, he'd know exactly where he was."

Finally, we wonder if either Smith or Mayer were surprised at the scale of the reaction to the Silver Sky's launch. "I'm a guitar maker and I'm getting fried at the stake by the internet guys." laughs Paul. "But everybody has a take on this old thing. It's like building a violin. John called it all along. He told me almost to the day what was going to happen! This is not his first pony ride on social media."





IN USE

Dimensionally, the Silver Sky feels very similar to our pre-CBS guitar with an almost identical width at the nut, while the neck's rounded shoulders are supremely comfortable, as are the fingerboard's softened edges. The profile evokes the right period without being too skinny down behind the first and second fret, where a scarf joint creates the headstock's back angle. Whether you are playing with a thumb over the top – as is Mayer's general way of doing things – or prefer to play full barre chords, you are unimpeded, and the immaculately installed and dressed fretwire definitely helps with clarity and note definition.

Plugged in for a listening test while surrounded by some trusted ears, the first response we hear is, 'Wow, it sounds like a pre-CBS Strat'. The original 1963 guitar has a little more of a phasey quality, with a more complex sheen of high end harmonics and more of a hint of natural chorus, but the similarities between the two far outweigh their differences. The Silver Sky has a little more definition, less noise and less fogginess – it's really like putting on a new pair of your favourite shoes rather than trying on a different style altogether.

THE SILVER SKY IS REALLY LIKE PUTTING ON A NEW PAIR OF YOUR FAVOURITE SHOES RATHER THAN TRYING ON A DIFFERENT STYLE ALTOGETHER

The revoiced highs were a personal preference that came directly from Mayer, who would often run his old Strats with the tone controls rolled back to five as a starting point "because there was so much extra high end harmonic stuff that I didn't like." With the Silver Sky, "at 10 it might be a little extra treble than you need in certain situations but it's not this unusable, unattractive treble stuff."

"It's got that warmer thing for me that I really like," he continues. "The high end isn't multiples of overtones high end that hits you in the ear, it's actually very musical high end that has low end in it. The high end has low end and the low end has high end. It's kind of a higher definition Strat to me. I wanted to go in and take out a lot of those frequencies you have to work to roll off."

Comparisons aside, the Silver Sky really is an extraordinarily expressive instrument

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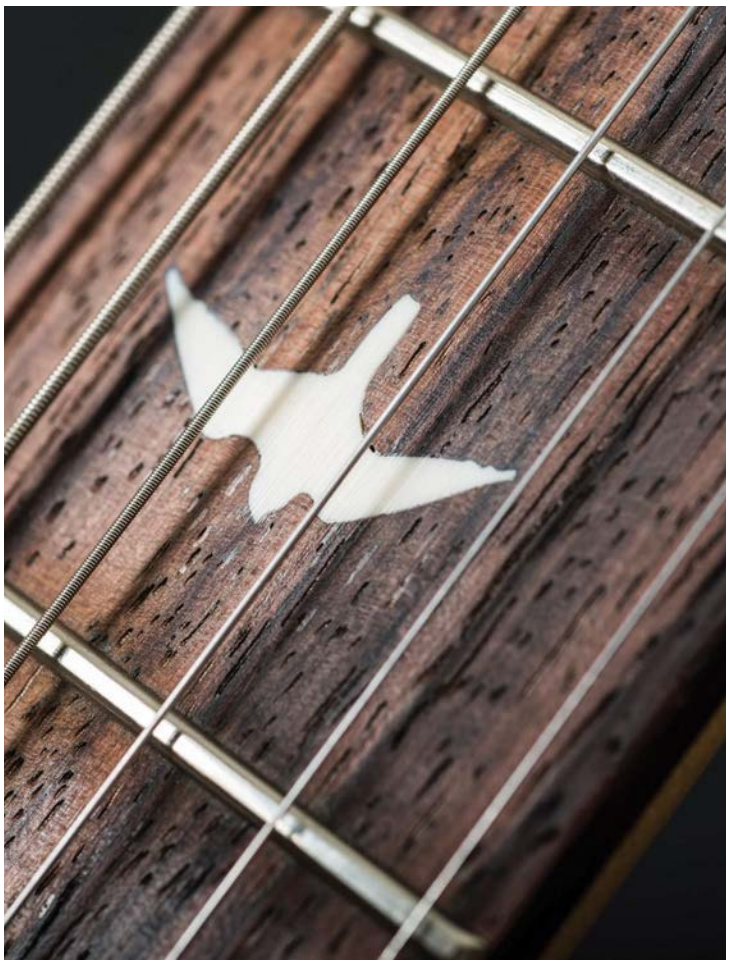

in its own right – you can hear how different parts of your pick or thumb change the front end of the note. There's huge variation depending on where you strike the string, and that's all before you flip the pickup selector switch away from the neck position. When you do, the balance between the Silver Sky's pickups is very good indeed – you don't switch to the bridge or in-between positions and find weakness, and none of the switch's five positions are indistinct or lacking in output level.

Set up as supplied from the factory there's just the right amount of fight and bounce from the 0.010 gauge strings. Each voice glitters with harmonic interest and there's an explosive, dynamic snap and punch to the guitar that suits stinging lead breaks and choppy, percussive funk rhythms.

PRS isn't the first company to take the blueprint of a pre-CBS Stratocaster and address the issues that can make them tricky beasts to tame while out on the road facing changing levels of heat and humidity. What's different about the Silver Sky is that it retains the spirit of what makes players gravitate towards those iconic guitars in the first place and throws PRS's formidable manufacturing consistency into the mix.

Mayer himself has indicated that more finish options and a maple 'board version of the Silver Sky are "very, very likely" at some point in the future, so don't expect this to be the last word from a collaboration that has already changed the conversation in the modern electric guitar industry.

KEY FEATURES

PRS Silver Sky

- **PRICE** £2,299 (first 500 include hardshell case, following models ship in premium gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 7.25" rosewood slab fingerboard, 22 'Acoustic' frets, bone nut and Small Bird inlays, double-action truss rod with headstock-end adjustment
- **HARDWARE** Locking vintage-style closed-back tuners with non-slip buttons, PRS Steel Tremolo vibrato bridge
- **ELECTRICS** 3x PRS 635JM single-coil pickups, 5-way blade pickup selector switch, master volume, neck/middle tone control, bridge tone control
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.6mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.0mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.0mm at nut, 53.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.4lb/3.4kg
- **FINISH** Body: Polyester base coat, acrylic urethane top coat, neck: nitrocellulose. Available finishes: Horizon (as reviewed), Tungsten, Frost, Onyx
- **CONTACT** PRS Europe 01223 874301 **www.prsguitars.com**

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Excellent vintage-style neck profile
+ Inspiring and versatile tones
+ Well built and well priced

– Some naysayers may never be converted

More than simply a signature guitar for a superstar, the Silver Sky is a successful marriage of the electric guitar's past and present that can do the job on any stage

9/10

8
9
10

WIN A Fender American Original '60s Telecaster!

When Leo Fender designed his legendary Telecaster, little could he have known that he was creating perhaps the most versatile guitar design of all time. From country to metal and pretty much every genre in-between, generations of guitarists of every stripe have been charmed by the utilitarian designs of Fender's first stroke of guitar-making genius.

But nothing is ever perfect out of the gate, and Fender has spent over 60 years refining and honing the Telecaster experience in a variety of ways – some have caught on, others not so much, but there remains something about the classic design that continues to inspire rock stars and bedroom strummers to this day.

With that in mind, Fender's brand new American Originals range gives you the best of both worlds – a stunning USA-made instrument that mixes vintage vibes with modern refinements. And thanks to Fender, one lucky Guitar Magazine reader will win an American Original '60s Telecaster for themselves!

Rather than slavishly attempt to recreate a specific year, the American Original concept is designed to be more of a 'best of' – putting together the best design features from a given decade with the aforementioned modern tweaks to create the perfect vintage-vibed guitar for a 2018 guitar player.

So, in the case of the American Original '60s Telecaster we're giving away this month, we get a stunning bound Lake Placid Blue finish with rosewood 'board, but with a neck that sports a more player-friendly 9.5-inch radius and a 'mid-60s' C profile. You also get three barrell-style saddles, and a pair of Fender's brand new Pure Vintage '64 Gray Bottom single coils to provide those iconic Tele Tones. We reviewed the American Original '60s Telecaster back in January 2018, and felt that it "hit all the right notes for fans of Fender's greatest hits".

To find out more about the American Original range, visit **fender.com**, and to be in with a chance of winning one for yourself, simply head to the link below and answer the following question:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/amoriginal

Q What was the original name of the Fender Telecaster?

A Broadcaster **B** Telesonic **C** T-sizzle

Closing date: 12:00am GMT, 21 June 2018

TERMS & CONDITIONS

The closing date is **12.00AM GMT 21 JUNE 2018**. The editor's decision is final. By entering The Guitar Magazine competitions, you are agreeing to receive details of future promotions from Anthem Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you do not want to receive this information, you can opt out. This giveaway is open to over 18s only. For full terms and conditions, please go to **anthem-publishing.com/competition-tcs**

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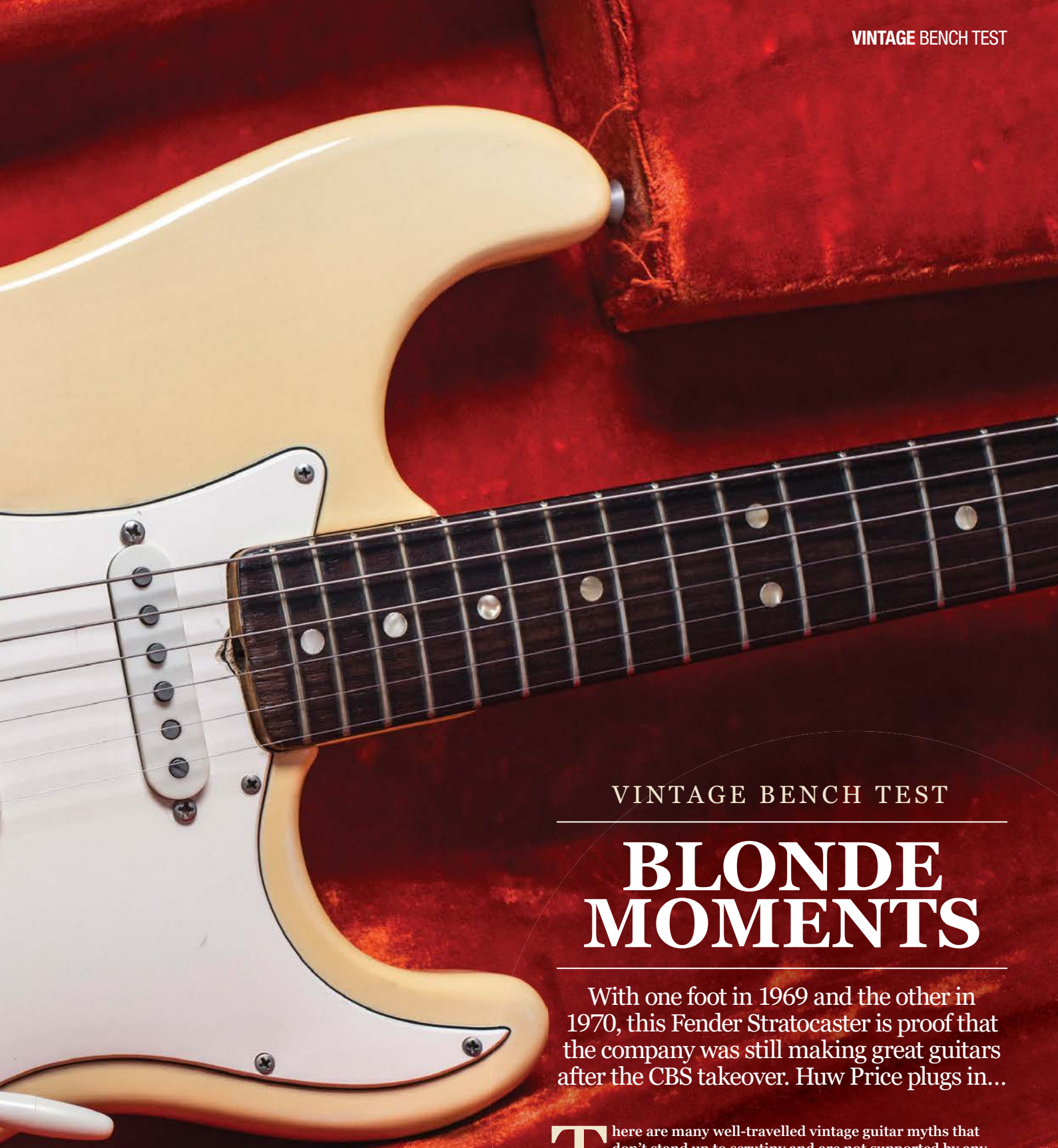


VINTAGE BENCH TEST

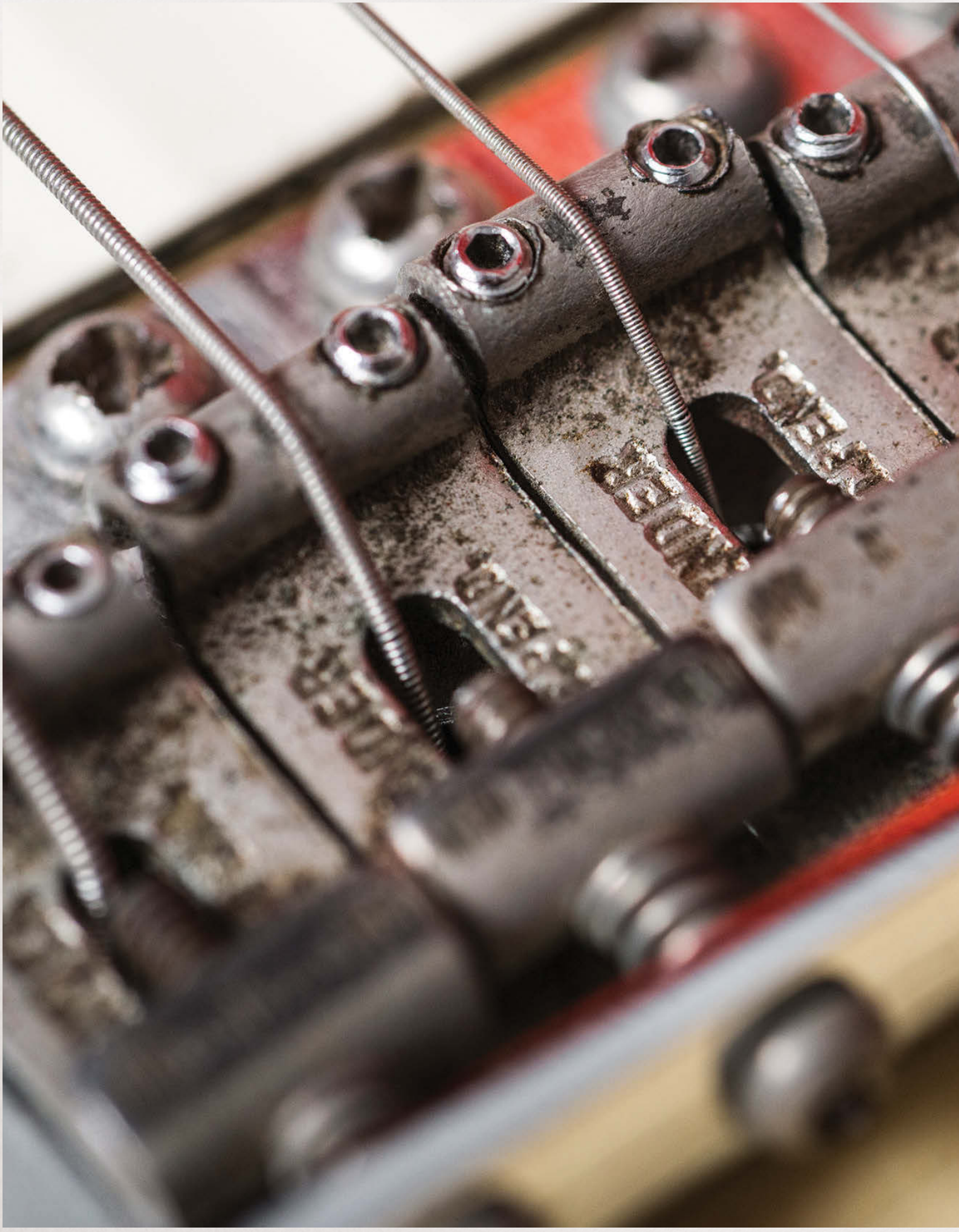
BLONDE MOMENTS

With one foot in 1969 and the other in 1970, this Fender Stratocaster is proof that the company was still making great guitars after the CBS takeover. Huw Price plugs in...

There are many well-travelled vintage guitar myths that don't stand up to scrutiny and are not supported by any concrete evidence. One of the most frequently repeated among these is the notion that 1965 was some sort of corporate 'year zero' for Fender and nothing was ever the same again. The truth is far from that.

Firstly, Leo Fender stayed on as a consultant after he sold the company to CBS, and even helped to develop new Fender models. And from a Strat-specific perspective, many of the features we associate with the pre-CBS era lingered on into the 1970s – the 1970 Stratocaster we have here exhibits several of them.

We can point to the four-bolt neck join, the pressed steel saddles with a patent application that was still pending and the steel vibrato block held to the bridge plate by three hefty screws. Although Fender was using machine-wound plain enamel magnet wire and grey flatwork by 1970, the staggered alnico magnets survived – albeit without their hand-bevelled edges.



Above **By 1970 the pickup edges were no longer hand-rubbed, but the polepieces were still staggered**

Left **The bridge saddles are of the pressed steel variety, still with the familiar 'patent pending' stamp**

Post-CBS Stratocaster bodies are generally supposed to be on the heavy side – in particular the ash ones. However, our blondie's ash body is light enough to have been made from leftover 1950s timber stock. The neck retains some of the older features, too. The clues can be seen beside the neck pickup, where the truss rod adjustment nut is located just below a rosewood veneer fingerboard.

Although neck construction, neck attachment and bridge assembly had remained essentially unchanged from around 1963 onwards, other things were no longer the same. The later features divide opinions today just as they did when this guitar was made.

> Many of the features associated with pre-CBS Strats lingered on into the 1970s

The most obvious break with the pre-CBS era is the reshaped headstock that was introduced in December 1965. Fender's Richard Smith explains that this was done simply to accommodate a bigger decal, but in the process "unintentionally ruined its visual balance".

If you grew up idolising Hendrix, Blackmore or Malmsteen, you may well disagree. The logo certainly showed up better on television and CBS's heightened brand emphasis extended to the F-stamped tuners and neck plate. Although the tuners may look different, they retained Leo Fender's clever drilled post design and they feel much like the earlier Kluson types to use.

KEY FEATURES

1970 Fender Stratocaster

- **PRICE** £12,995
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Ash body, bolt-on maple neck with rosewood veneer fingerboard, pearl markers and 21 frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage style bridge with separate vibrato block and pressed steel saddles, F-branded tuners with drilled string posts
- **ELECTRICS** 3x original staggered single coils
- **FINISH** Translucent Blonde
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 40.96mm at nut, 51.45mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.7mm at nut, 55.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.45kg/7.6lbs
- **CONTACT** ATB Guitars **www.atbguitars.com**

Top left **The lack of checking leads us to conclude this is a very thin poly finish**

Top right **Despite this being a 70s Fender, it retains the classic four-bolt neck join**

Bottom **The lettering and numbers on the knobs have taken on a green hue over time**

Even more controversial was the decision to switch from cellulose to aliphatic urethane (aka poly) finishes. According to all the sources, a 1970 Stratocaster should have a poly finish, but the true picture is somewhat more complex. Fender had been using a non-cellulose basecoat called Fullerplast since the early 1960s and some custom colours were actually acrylic rather than nitrocellulose. To complicate matters further, it's reported that some finishes had nitro colours topped with clear poly topcoats, while others had poly basecoats topped with clear nitro. So what exactly is blondie wearing?

> The finish is remarkable and we imagine it's much the same colour as when it was new

The answer is that we're not entirely sure. Everything on this guitar glows under a blacklight exactly as you would expect vintage nitrocellulose to. Peeking under the spring cover we see three original springs and one newer addition, but there is hardly any tan line.

Blacklighting highlights minimal play wear to reveal a white base coat, but the finish condition is remarkable and we imagine the colour looks much the same today as it did when new. There are a few small dents and nicks, but no checking cracks whatsoever. So we're betting on it being a very thin and attractive translucent poly finish, although the headstock face is most likely nitro because decals reacted badly to poly.

All the plastic parts check out, and the lettering on the knobs has turned a very vibrant shade of green.

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Top **The enlarged headstock was a polarising change, but Hendrix fans will love it and the F-stamped tuners retain Leo Fender's drilled post design**

Middle **The rosewood veneer fingerboard's 7.25-inch radius is a feature that remained unchanged following the CBS takeover**

The seller informs us that the wiring is all original, with unbroken solder joints on the spring claw and output jack. A five-way switch was installed at some point but a period-correct three-way has been reinstated.

> Its lively, balanced, deep acoustic tone compares with a top-notch Strat from any era

IN USE

It is often said that vintage guitars that haven't been played much probably weren't very good to begin with. However, over the years we've seen several examples of vintage instruments with very little playwear that blow that theory right out of the water. Blondie here is one such example.

As alluded to earlier, it also disproves another widely held assumption that all 1970s ash-bodied Strats were ship's anchors. Weighing just 7.6lbs, it has the feel and balance we associate with vintage Strats from the pre-CBS era and its lively, balanced, deep and loud acoustic

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Above **The neck pocket isn't exactly a snug fit, but it doesn't have any ill effects when it comes to this highly collectible Strat's tone and playability**

tone compares favourably with a top-notch Stratocaster from any era.

The neck feel is very much of its time with a fairly deep C profile that retains a relatively even depth from headstock to heel, and the 7.25-inch fingerboard radius requires the string action to be set a little higher to prevent bend chokes. Not that you'd notice, because it has a very slinky and played-in feel.

Plugging in, it soon becomes apparent that the guitar doesn't deliver the chewy and powerful Strat tones typical of the instruments built during the first half of the 1960s. It has a brighter, snappier voice and slightly lower output than a Strat equipped with pre-CBS pickups. It's certainly different, but pretty fantastic in its own way. There's a wiry bite, a metallic edge and a sinewy sort of sustain that works really well for cutting blues solos and chord work. The definition is outstanding and – when you can find them using the three-way switch – the in-between positions are a funkster's dream.

> The wiry bite and sinewy sustain work well for cutting blues solos and chord work

It's not so much an inherent brightness that characterises the pickups, but rather a less forward midrange. Once you figure out how to set the tone controls of your dirt pedal, this can work to your advantage. Glistening cleans can morph into heavy overdrive, while retaining high midrange cut along with tightly defined lows and superb touch dynamics.

Blonde Strats from this era are rare and it's unlikely that many survive in such 'time capsule' condition. Ultimately our time with this example teaches us that although some things had changed, Fender was still making outstanding guitars at the end of the 1960s.

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1961 Fender Stratocaster Fiesta refin
1962 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1966 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1968 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1969 Fender Stratocaster maple cap s/b
1970 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB

1951 Fender Nocaster
1956 Fender Telecaster
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline
1970 Fender Telecaster Oly White

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1960 Fender Jazzmaster s/b
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold

1952 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1954 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1962 Gibson Les Paul/SG
1963 Gibson SG Junior
1964 Gibson Firebird VII

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DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

FODERA IMPERIAL CUSTOM

Brooklyn-based builder Fodera has a reputation for high-end bases, but its guitars don't do things in the conventional way either – the striking Imperial Custom six-string is no exception. Dave Hunter thinks outside the box...

As we cruise rapidly toward the end of the second decade of the 21st century, its an unavoidable fact that many guitar makers are still deeply referencing just a handful of designs established a good 60 years ago. With that in mind, it's rather refreshing to lay hands on a manufacturer that doesn't seem to give two sticks about some implied necessity to make their guitars look at least 90 per cent like a Fender or Gibson.

In the case of Fodera such independence likely comes from the fact that it has long been one of the most revered makers of high-end custom bass guitars – a field where devotion to the classics is less common. Its creations are played by Victor Wooton, Mike Pope, Felix Pastorius, Anthony Jackson and scores of other big-name masters of the low-end, and Fodera has never been obsessed with making instruments that look like anything that has come before.

> The Imperial Custom resists aping any existing make or model in the slightest

As such, this Imperial Custom guitar is entirely its own creature. Sure, it has six strings, two pickups, four knobs, and is built to a broadly recognizable 'guitar-like' shape and a common scale length. But it resists aping any existing make or model in the slightest, yet comes off looking accessible, elegant, and even 'classic' in the process. And if even after all this you're still inclined to say, "Well, it's essentially a Les Paul with a differently shaped body, cutaway, and headstock..." then think again, Batman. Virtually every element of the way this guitar is put together is done differently – and very differently – than on that set-neck, single-cut standard.

The headstock is faced with the same Masur birch as the body

KEY FEATURES

Fodera Imperial Custom

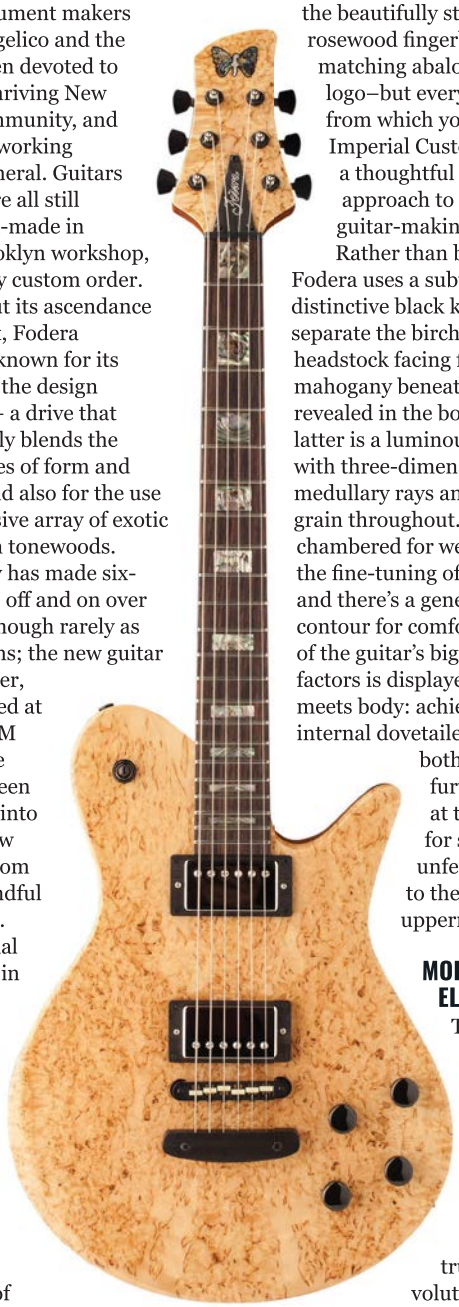
- **PRICE** £5,779 (approx, plus shipping and any duties)
- **BODY** Chambered mahogany body with Masur birch top
- **NECK** 3-piece, glued-in mahogany, medium-C profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Indian rosewood, 12" radius, 24.75" scale length
- **FRETS** 22 medium nickel-silver
- **NUT** Graph Tech, 1.69" wide
- **PICKUPS** 2x Lollar Imperial humbuckers
- **ELECTRONICS** Independent volume and tone for each pickup, three-way switch
- **HARDWARE** Sperzel locking tuners, TonePros tune-o-matic bridge, Fodera brass-and-rosewood tailpiece
- **FINISH** Tiger-eye top with honey back
- **CONTACT** fodera.com

BROOKLYN BEAT

Fodera was founded in 1983 by luthier Vinny Fodera and bassist Joey Lauricella, and while that might not sound like all that long ago, in feel and intent the company has a direct link to the old-world, big-city instrument makers such as D'Angelico and the like, craftsmen devoted to serving the thriving New York jazz community, and professional working players in general. Guitars and basses are all still entirely hand-made in Fodera's Brooklyn workshop, and largely by custom order.

Throughout its ascendance in the market, Fodera also became known for its originality in the design department – a drive that most definitely blends the dual objectives of form and function – and also for the use of an impressive array of exotic and premium tonewoods. The company has made six-string guitars off and on over the years, although rarely as standard items; the new guitar range, however, was introduced at Winter NAMM 2017, and the line-up has been consolidated into 2018 with new availability from stock at a handful of US dealers.

The Imperial model comes in two grades, Deluxe and Custom. Our review sample is the latter, meaning it features more exotic woods and upgraded inlays. Both of these elements are likely among the first things to grab you when you set eyes on this guitar – namely in the insanely hypnotic Masur birch top and matching headstock overlay, and the colourful, swirly abalone block fingerboard inlays in the beautifully striped Indian rosewood fingerboard and matching abalone butterfly logo–but every angle from which you view this Imperial Custom reveals a thoughtful new approach to solidbody guitar-making.



Rather than binding, Fodera uses a subtle yet distinctive black key-line to separate the birch top and headstock facing from the mahogany beneath it. As revealed in the body, the latter is a luminous sample with three-dimensional medullary rays and a fine grain throughout. The body is chambered for weight relief and the fine-tuning of resonance, and there's a generous ribcage contour for comfort. But one of the guitar's biggest 'wow' factors is displayed where neck meets body: achieved with an internal dovetailed joint, it's both heel-less, and further recessed at the body side for smooth and unfettered access to the guitar's uppermost frets.

MODERN ELEGANCE

The neck itself is a three-piece mahogany build for optimum stability, with a reversible truss-rod and a volute behind the

The Fodera's build is unlike any other single-cut set-neck guitar you're likely to have come across

nut for further support. Its profile is a rounded 'C' of medium depth that feels somehow pre-eminently 'modern', and yet it's extremely comfortable and, I'd wager, likely to be broadly appealing to a wide swathe of players. The bridge is a black TonePros ABR-1 tune-o-matic-style with vinyl saddles, which Fodera feels offer a slightly sweeter tone, particularly when you're playing near the bridge. The stop tailpiece into which it's all anchored is Fodera's own 'high-mass' construction, with a solid brass bar set into a rosewood shell. The pickup rings are also rosewood, while the knobs are knurled black-plated steel with a slight taper, and the tuners are locking matt black Sperzel units.

Fodera is using custom-wound Seymour Duncan pickups on many of its guitars, but this Imperial Custom carries a pair of low-wind Lollar Imperials aimed at a sound toward the brighter end of the PAF spectrum, reading 7.72k ohms in the bridge position and 6.90k ohms in the neck. Controls include the traditional four-knob complement plus a three-way toggle selector on the upper bout. Rather than traditional strap buttons, the guitar is made with Dunlop's 'flush mount' (ie inset/recessed) strap-lock system. And one off-piste comment: the high-quality Cedar Creek case, included, has one of the most comfortable handles I've ever grasped, along with a certificate of authenticity, and truss-rod and bridge adjustment tools in its accessory pocket.

IN USE

Even after its journey through the cold of winter in the North-eastern US, the Imperial Custom plays superbly right out of the case, and exhibits a lively, ringing tone unplugged. Tested through a selection of amps that includes a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab and a tweed Deluxe-style combo, the guitar proved extremely articulate and well balanced when plugged in. Somewhat belying my premise at the top here, you might argue, the Imperial Custom pretty easily achieves most of what you'd expect to get from a good Les Paul, in the general sense at least – the easy sustain, the thick, singing lead tones via amp overdrive, the thick-bodied cleans – but it leans somewhat more toward crispness and snappiness, and slightly away from the prominently thick lower-mids of the classic LP.

None of which is to say it needs to remain an overly polite guitar when you want more savage moods from it. The Imperial Custom performs extremely well with the Friedman's lead channel rolled up for cranked-modded-Marshall-style tones, going plenty mean and aggressive when necessary, but also with a string-to-string clarity that you don't hear in many dual-humbucker guitars. My core impression is that this is an extremely refined performance tool, which means it will perform as you want it to, being an extremely pliant and biddable instrument. Ultimately, it's a beauty of a six-string that should forge a reputation for Fodera as much more than 'just' a custom bass maker.

> It plays superbly right out of the case, and exhibits a lively, ringing tone unplugged

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MOVIN' ON UP

Think of an old-school blues-rocker, or a pop band from the 1960s and Tony Kelsey has probably been involved in some way or another. While busy working the circuit, he still finds time for local pub gigs with friends in the West Midlands. Lars Mullen heads into the Black Country...

If there's one thing that Tony Kelsey is even more passionate about that his guitars, it's evangelising about the role that his neck of the woods has played in the in the growth of pop and rock music in the UK. "The West Midlands has played a major role in music industry," Tony insists as we sit down to chat through his wonderful guitar collection. "The number of rock bands that came from this area during the British beat boom in the 60s and onward toward heavy rock, is quite incredible, the list is endless."

Endless it might very well be, but Tony actually began his long and storied music career a fair bit further south. "I actually started my career playing the scene in London and joined Alvin Stardust's band in '79," he recalls fondly. "TV and radio slots and touring all the big venues was an insight to pop music at that time. I had all the classic guitars, but I later started leaning towards Fender – mainly Teles and Strats – which I've since used with the likes of The Jess Roden Band, Mike Sanchez, The Robbie Blunt Band, Jim Capaldi, and The Move, who I've been with since 2010."

MESA
ENGINEERING

It's an impressive CV, and one that Tony has augmented by taking advantage of his location to jam and gig with some other impressive names in the Midlands music scene.

"There are a lot of great musicians here in this area and we'll often get together for a charity gig or two," he explains. "It's usually more or less 'off the cuff' as we know most of the songs between us. For these occasions, I'll use my favourite white '65 Telecaster as I know it'll stay in tune and handle anything I throw at it. I've used this one on so many tours and local gigs with Robert Plant, Steve Winwood and The Steve Gibbons Band. It's one of three guitars I take on tour with The Move, where I need drop D tuning for their 60s hits including *I Can Hear The Grass Grow*."

SPRINKLING STARDUST

Over the years, Tony has assembled a carefully curated collection of interesting instruments, and as a working musician, he makes sure that most of them get used either on stage or in the studio.

"Thankfully, I have a use for most of my guitars," he confirms. "Heaven forbid any of them sitting in dusty corners – they all get used. My Les Paul Black Beauty Custom dating from 1970, for example, is a crucial studio guitar I use all the time at Serious Studios in Stourport, Worcestershire – it was also on some of the early Alvin Stardust hits. I've had it about 20 years now and to me, it's never felt like your typical Les Paul, sonically. It's extra bright with a lot of top end that cuts right through without being harsh. Both humbuckers are really clear and punchy, certainly not muddy. It's very heavy, with a mahogany body and neck and a maple cap. It must be down to the density of the woods they used at the time. It's starting to show its age now with the yellowing body bindings and worn gold hardware. It's pretty much all original except for the bridge, which was replaced for me by Tony Iommi's tech, Mike Clements.

When it comes to getting out on stage, however, the Les Paul goes away and he veers towards the Fullerton end of the guitar spectrum.

"For live work, I'm Fender though and through," Tony affirms. "My Sonic Blue Fender Relic Custom Shop 1960 reissue is number two in my trio of gigging guitars. I've swapped the original pickups with a set of Zexcoil Vintage Modern Strat single coils, which have a separate winding for each magnet. They have all the classic Strat tones but without the noise. They're ideal for me as

Opposite **Tony's '65 Tele is his gigging workhorse, while his Fernandes T-type was bought from John Thomas of Welsh rockers Budgie**

Above left **Tony modded this Fernandes S-type with Wilkinson P-90s and a custom slim neck**

Above top right **This white Strat bares the scars of many gig-related accidents**

Above bottom right **Tony's Fender Custom Shop 1960 Stratocaster has been modded with Zexcoil Vintage Modern Strat pickups**

Above left **PRS gave Tony this David Grissom Signature model after his original's finish was damaged**

Above right **The Fender Stratocaster XII was bought new around 10 years ago**

I was getting a lot of interference from stage lighting in some of the bigger venues.

"I first heard about them from Robbie Blunt who is a pal and also has an endorsement with them. I fitted a short vibrato arm as I felt the original was just too long and I seemed to get tangled up a lot," he laughs. "It's in DADGAD tuning at the moment which I like a lot, just to approach songs in a different way. I used this tuning on this guitar in the band Quill for a darker sound."

BOXING CLEVER

Amps, of course, play a major part in the sonic equation for any guitarist, but as the years pass, Tony has started to think about his back as much as his tone when it comes to gigging choices.

"I use my Mesa/Boogie Lone Star Special combo quite a bit, which sounds great," he reflects. "But it's almost a two-man lift – that's fine provided I have a crew with me! I also like my Fender Tone-Master, which used to belong to Jeff Beck, but my Two-Rock Jet 35 head is my all-round favourite amp – it's literally 'plug in and go', it's small, and sounds incredible. I'm currently using this set up in the Bev Bevan Band on the Jasper Carrot Stand Up And Rock tour, which has been running about five years and is a complete sell out every time.

Also slotting into Tony's touring rig is a Fernandes S-type, which has been heavily modded and enhanced over the years.

"It's fitted with a pair of Trevor Wilkinson P-90s and a slim, oiled, neck with an ebony fingerboard," he explains. "I had the neck made for me by a guy known just as 'Joe' at Guitar Spares & Repairs in Birmingham. I asked him to make me this neck after an accident while playing football with some youngsters. I was in goal, and the ball flew in and dislocated my thumb. I was in agony – red wine and pain killers helped me through a gig that night, but I had to use the chord shapes to hold the guitar as I played, not easy at all. The thumb is fine now and I still love the neck profile."

HAZARD PAY

It's not just his sporting endeavours that have seen Tony come a cropper, however – he's suffered more than one on-stage injury as well...

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Left **Tony's a big fan of baritone guitars, and often uses this pair of Danelectros for writing purposes**

Right **The Ozark 2255 F mandolin is called on when Tony wants to indulge his folk impulses with the likes of Martin Simpson**

Opposite **The Martin HD-28 has been Tony's faithful acoustic companion for 15 years**

"I've had a few near misses when I think about it," he chuckles. "The big ding on the upper edge of my white Strat happened when Bev Bevan's cymbal stands came crashing down. I love my Fenders, but I'm glad it wasn't my head! I've had this guitar for nearly 40 years – well, the body at least, as the neck is a John Diggins Jaydee Custom '54 neck, which he fitted about 15 years ago.

"It's the neck from a very accurate Buddy Holly replica S-type that John made a while ago. It's beautiful. If you look closely, you can see where he had to inlay a piece of maple in the side of the neck at the third fret – that's where Bev tried to kill me again with another cymbal... bless him. He had to set his own kit up that night as we didn't have a crew – he hadn't done that for 50 years and forgot to tighten it all up."

It's not just absent-minded drummers that have caused issues with Tony's guitars, however - even the leaving a guitar in its case isn't free from danger...

"I also had a mishap with my PRS David Grissom Signature model," he smiles wearily. "I'm told that at the time, it was the only standard PRS to be finished in nitrocellulose, which of course never completely hardens off. I found that out when I left the strap on the body in the case for a few days. When I opened it, the top looked like a chewed wine gum. It seems the chemicals PRS used to tan the leather reacted with the finish.

"But they were so good – they collected the guitar and sent another in the same Cherry Sunburst finish but with a 10-top saying they hoped I'd be pleased with the new guitar – how good was that? Grissom is a Texan player who is fanatical about tone. I once used this one to play *Paranoid* with Tony Iommi, how cool to play the song with the guy who wrote it?"

> I find there's a different approach to writing with a baritone electric, which I really enjoy

SEMI-RETIRED

Given his occasional guitar-related mishaps, it's understandable that Tony is thinking about taking one of his more fragile instruments off the road.

"I'm thinking of retiring my semi-hollow Ibanez Artist AM-205," he admits. "It doesn't quite fit my criteria for studio or live work. It's very collectable now, so it'll be preserved, but not neglected. I love playing this guitar, it has a beautiful mellow sound and a classic example of Ibanez craftsmanship from the early 80s."

When it comes to making music, however, Tony often finds that a change of scale leads to a change in thinking.

"I write a lot with acoustics, but I find there's a whole different approach to writing with a baritone electric, which I really enjoy," he observes. "I have two at the

moment, both Danelectro and loaded with lipstick pickups – a black Vintage '56 and a Dead On 67. I love Buddy Miller's delivery with a baritone, especially in The Band Of Joy. I think a baritone has its own sonic space, rather like my Fender Stratocaster XII. It's one of the very few guitars that I bought from new about 10 years ago. It records so well, even straight into the desk with just a compressor in the line. A 12-string was used on several Move hits including *Fire Brigade* and *Flowers In The Rain*."

ACOUSTIC ROOTS

When it comes to the aforementioned acoustic playing, Tony calls on a selection of well-loved instruments that he knows won't let him down.

"I've always had a soft spot for folk music as well, the fingerpicking style of Martin Simpson for example," he observes. "I often sit around with Martin with maybe this little Ozark 2255 F model mandolin and my favourite Martin HD-28 and see what comes out of a session. The Martin is about 15 years old and sounds so sweet, I only need to play a few chords and songs just fall out of this one.

"I have one in the same body style made by Sigma, which is a bit more affordable, but I was never happy with the high-gloss finish on the top, so I decided to take it back to the wood. I'd talked to Ralph McTell who said he took the finish off one of his Gibson acoustics back in the 60s, and it sounded a lot better, so I thought I'd have a go. It did make a huge difference, but I'll never do it again, as it was an endless rubbing down project that took me months and months!"

Before we end our chat, there's just time to for Tony to pull out a few T-types that both have stories to tell...

"I nearly forgot my red Fernandes Revival Tele," he chuckles. "I bought it from the late John Thomas, who was the guitarist in Welsh rock band Budgie. He was such a great player, if it wasn't for him there wouldn't be Metallica, who actually play some of his songs. I've also installed Zexcoil pickups; this is a loud Tele!

"Like my white Tele, it's one I'll reach for if a bunch of friends call up for a charity gig or two. I did one on New Year's Eve with this guitar playing a variety of soul, gospel and rock songs like Led Zeppelin's *Ramble On* and *Trampled Under Foot* with Matt Worley on guitar, Ron Newall on bass, Abby Brant on keys and Robert Plant on vocals – I was thinking, can it get any better than this?"

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Fender
TELECASTER

Founders Keepers

FANTASTIC FOUR

Our look at the Fender Custom Shop's 30th Anniversary Founders Design models concludes with a quartet of bolt-ons that are heavy on bling...

Custom Shop Fenders. Like buses. You wait around for ages and then four show up all at once! And yet it only takes one glance at our flamboyant quartet of Founders Design models to realise that this isn't going to be your regular bus ride to work – it's more of a magical mystery tour. From left to right, our four-piece includes the Fred Stuart Herringbone Telecaster, the Alan Hamel Sparkle Telecaster, the Mark Kendrick Stratocaster and the JW Black Stratocaster.

Inspired by a pre-war Martin Herringbone D-28, Stuart's Telecaster design betrays his love for bluegrass. Fred had seen many a bluegrass guitarist make the jump from a Martin acoustic to playing electric on a Telecaster and both, he says, have an "initial defining quality."

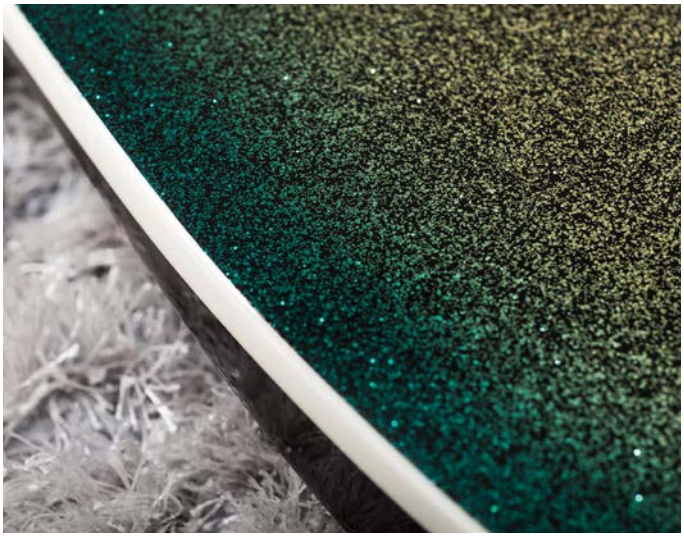
Alan Hamel arrived at the Custom Shop in 1992, five years after Fred Stuart, with whom he often shared stages. Hamel's Sparkle Telecaster is a reference to what brought him to Fender in the first place, as he was initially hired when the Custom Shop were looking for somebody to take care of sparkle finishes. The bridge pickup is a replica of an early model Broadcaster pickup with specifications coming from Alan's research for *The Blackguard* book.

Mark Kendrick's Custom Shop career also began with paint, but soon progressed – hired in 1991, by 1992 he was building. The Golden Teal Sparkle Burst on his Founders Design guitar – with contrasting transparent walnut back and sides – is inspired by the "Cholo lowrider culture" in 1970s Santa Ana, while the guitar also features a trio of Kendrick's own Stratocaster pickups.

Few can claim to have been more influential in the first decade of the Fender Custom Shop than JW Black, and although he was instrumental in bringing the art of relicing to Fender, his Founders Design instrument couldn't be further removed from that phenomenon. As well as working with the likes of Clapton, Beck, Dylan and The Rolling Stones, Black also built a lot of instruments for the doctor/lawyer clientele.

"They were a weekend warrior guitar player collector group, and when you talked to them, you knew they were making a special gift for themselves," says Black, and heavily figured tops such as the one on the JW Black Founders Design Stratocaster here became something of a calling card for the former Custom Shop man.

Fittingly, when asked about this instrument he says that "It's still about Leo and how he served the musician. It's taking his greatest designs and just adding modern twists, artist input, player input, and coming up with something that honours his original concept, but brings it up to standards for the modern player." We suspect that the Fender Custom Shop will continue to do just that for at least another 30 years and way beyond that.



THE REVERB TOP 10

REVERB PEDALS

A reverb pedal can be one of the most transformative boxes on your board. Dan Orkin from Reverb.com picks out the 10 most popular units on the online gear marketplace...

Welcome back to our ongoing series of articles that showcase the top-selling pedals from different categories on Reverb.com. As the world's largest music gear marketplace, we see thousands of pedals sell on our site every week, and these rankings reflect the best-selling models across new and used pedals sales from all over the world. So far in this series, we've covered the 10 best-selling overdrive and delay pedals. Today, we're fixing our sights on the wide realm of reverb.

While historically, reverb has been seen as the domain of amps (think the onboard spring circuit of a 60s Fender Twin Reverb, for instance) the evolution and availability of digital processing has ushered in an age where there are many hundreds of different reverb pedals to choose from on today's market. From do-it-all emulators such as the top-ranked TC Electronic Hall of Fame to combination delay-reverbs including the EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run, there are several key reverb genres available to today's guitarists. Hopefully, this list will help you find which type is right for you.

Seen something you need to add to your pedalboard? Head to Reverb.com and pick one up for yourself!

1 TC Electronic Hall Of Fame
Now in its second iteration, the Hall Of Fame from TC Electronic continues its reign as a best-in-class all-rounder. This pedal can tackle just about any type of reverb you can imagine – or download via TonePrint – in an affordable and readily available package.

2 Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail
While somewhat less versatile than other entries on the list, the Holy Grail (most commonly found in a smaller 'nano' enclosure) is known for its classic tone across three modes. If you're interested in just a base coat of spacey tone, the Holy Grail is a great choice.

3 Strymon BigSky
One of Strymon's big box pedals, the BigSky can tackle just about any form of Reverb you can imagine. The BigSky was introduced as an updated and expanded follow up to the BlueSky (see below) but with newly designed reverb algorithms that rival the sound quality you'd find from rack units in professional recording studios.

4 Strymon BlueSky
Like its big brother mentioned above, the BlueSky from Strymon can generate a nearly endless array of highly customisable reverb effects, but with a more space-conscious enclosure. There a ton of bells and whistles under-the-hood to satisfy even the most demanding live or studio deployments, too.

5 TC Electronic Hall of Fame Mini
The Mini version of the Hall of Fame features many of the same reverb algorithms as its full-size counterpart, but differs in that its parameters can be only tweaked via TC Electronic's clever TonePrint smartphone app. While not ideal for those who like to change settings on the fly, it's a convenient options for any player that really only needs one reverb setting in their chain.

6 Strymon Flint
A combination digital pedal from Strymon, the Flint is something like a classic Fender amp in a box, in that it offers both reverb and tremolo effects. The reverb channel has a toggle for 60s, 70s, and 80s modes, which contour the sound to match the prevailing tones of each decade.

7 EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run
The first digital pedal from the widely admired and always innovative EarthQuaker Devices, the Avalanche Run is a combination stereo delay and reverb that's oriented towards experimental players. If you like creating and getting lost in strange soundscapes, this is a great pedal to add to your board.

8 Boss RV-6
The heir to the ubiquitous RV-5, the updated RV-6 has finally surpassed its predecessor on the sales rankings. This updated pedal ups the reverb mode count to a total of eight flexible options.

9 DigiTech Polara
Part of a new wave of compact pedals from DigiTech, the Polara reverb is like several other entries on the list in that it offers a range of different modes that will cover most reverb needs. The Polara also includes a reverse reverb mode – a key asset for any aspiring shoegazer.

10 Boss RV-3
Despite being out of production for over 15 years, the Boss RV-3 continues to sell strongly on the used pedal market. This was one of the first combination reverb/delay pedals, a format that has come back into prominence over the past few years.

Ones TO Watch

MARY SPENDER

The UK guitarist has parlayed YouTube fame into her first headline tour. She tells Josh Gardner about her unconventional success...

As with so many guitarists, it all started with a Squier for Mary Spender, but not in the way you'd think... "After seeing some boys at school with their Squiers, I found my great grandmother's Spanish guitar that was gathering dust," she recalls of her first guitar encounter. "I started teaching myself on that, while it took me year to save up for my first electric – a Yamaha Pacifica 112 and a Laney practice amp, which I still have today! I was quite lucky and my parents had good taste in music. So I grew up on Joni Mitchell, Tracy Chapman, Dire Straits and The Rolling Stones. I was also studying classical music – violin, viola and piano – but I never had lessons on guitar."

It's a very solid foundation, but over the years she's built on this to develop a style that blends her sultry vocals with an unusual percussive fingerpicked electric technique – blurring the boundaries of pop, blues and soul. "My style has changed a lot," she affirms. "I've drifted through a few different genres, as well as my voice maturing quite a lot, too. I started playing in heavy rock bands as a teenager, then even dabbled in electronic music, but have settled on writing my own material in quite a bluesy style.

"To make a living in music, you have to find your niche and then work very hard on carving it out. I've worked as a freelance musician for quite a few years playing cover gigs and weddings around Bristol and the South West, but started focusing on my own material and making videos this time last year. My career has changed somewhat!"

The fruition of this process can be seen in her recent material, including latest single, *Opposite*, which showcases her crystal clean fingerpicked electric guitar in full flight. It's an unusual vibe for an electric guitar player, but it's something that grew out of the realities of the road.

"Although I started on electric, I switched when I was 19, as it was easier to travel with just an electro-acoustic," Mary explains. "I went back to electric in 2015, but kept on fingerpicking... so yes, it's also why I play with 0.011-0.049 gauge strings!"

TUBE THUMPING

YouTube is one of the most powerful tools that young musicians have to get their music out there, but Mary took a different approach to the website, which has proved hugely successful, and also enabled her to indulge her guitar and gear obsessions along the way with her 'Tuesday Talks' series, which blends practical advice about gear, songwriting and technique with interviews with guitarists, online guitar personalities and gear makers.

"I've had my YouTube account since 2006 and started with just music videos I had made with my friends," she recalls. "It took me a really long time to find something I could do consistently, but I knew I enjoyed film making and I also watched [m ega-popular YouTube personality] Casey Neistat's daily vlog, and thought it would be interesting to do something music-related.

> "To make a living in music, you have to find your niche and then work very hard on carving it out"

"I started 'Tuesday Talks' in September of 2016 and it's just grown since then. I still perform original music on the channel and vlog my trips, but I also get to interview successful guitarists, including Devin Townsend, KT Tunstall, Kaki King and most recently James Valentine from Maroon 5. I enjoy the variety. I love documenting the whole process of what it takes to be a musician in the 21st century, but really love interviewing guitarists and hearing about their journey."

If her path to success has been rather unconventional, then Spender's guitar choices are equally outside of the norm...

"I've never gone for what other guitarists would expect," she affirms. "For a short time I did own an Arctic White Mexican Strat, it's almost a rite of passage for any guitarist. But I now understand why I don't like certain guitars and for me it's pretty simple; the neck has to be really slim, with a low action and I prefer a shorter scale lengths, too. I don't use a plectrum either, so huge Gibson acoustics just wouldn't work for me."

FRENCH CONNECTION

What does work for Mary, however, are the unconventional charms of a pair of Vigier

electrics - a GV Rock and an Excalibur - that she ended up with thanks to a series of unlikely moments of serendipity.

"Well, weirdly, Ben Whatsley, who sold me my first guitar, ended up becoming Vigier's UK manager," she recalls. "We stayed in touch, and he even used to play bass for me. I was then introduced to the whole team at his wedding and I just thought they were a lovely bunch of people. They kindly gave me a pass to NAMM in 2015 and the rest is history. I've since been to the factory in France and Patrice and Lina have just been very accommodating."

It was at that NAMM show that she found and fell in love with her main squeeze, a GV Rock in Revolution Green. "I knew that it was unique and an extremely versatile instrument, not just meant for heavy music," she adds. "I now have quite an eclectic range of gear for a bluesy guitarist."

This eclectic gear collection includes her Excalibur Indus, which has been tricked out with the A Little Thunder pickup - something that really helps her out when she's gigging without a full band.

"It's a really fun bit of kit, especially for a solo guitarist, as it drops the lowest two or three strings an octave (or two) below," Mary explains. "It has a special jack input, too, so you need a stereo XY cable for it to work. You then plug one lead into a guitar amp and the other into a bass amp."

SAINT'S ALIVE

Her most recent guitar purchase is impossible for anyone miss, however – a limited edition neon orange Music Man St Vincent signature model that most of us would certainly struggle to pull off...

"What's not to love?!" Mary chuckles. "It's just a crazy guitar – especially with the leopard print pickguard. I'd been eyeing up the St Vincent signatures for a really long time and then they released the super-limited edition versions to celebrate her latest album release, so I just bought it straight away. I've been a huge fan of Annie Clark's music and met her briefly. It's one of three in the world and it's signed, so possibly an investment, too."

Mary's Vigier GV Rock is her go-to instrument

There's no use in having the perfect gear set-up if you haven't got anything worthwhile to do with it, however, but Spender has been putting it all to good use for some time: she's supported artists as diverse as Gabrielle Aplin and Mike Dawes recently, but is stepping up to the headline slot with a headline UK tour with a full backing band in March 2018 – something Mary is understandably brimming with excitement about.

"It's going really well and I'm very excited as it's my first headline tour ever," she enthuses. "I've always loved performing with other musicians. I grew up playing viola in orchestras, so I like working as a team."

As an artist who wears so many different hats, its hard to know what Spender will turn her hand to next, but for the time being it seems like she's happy to keep doing what she's doing – but bigger and better.

"I plan on keeping everything up and just being consistent!" she affirms. "I'm releasing a lot of music over the next few months and that's the real priority. I want to do more and more videos, too, showing behind the scenes of producing tracks and making music videos. I've also got a few collaborations coming up that are very exciting, so watch this space!"

Mary Spender's latest single, *Opposite*, is out now. For more information about her music and videos, visit maryspender.com

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Why I *Love My...*

ROMEO STODART

WHY I LOVE MY GIBSON ES-335

The Magic Numbers frontman is rarely seen without his trusty Gibson semi - he tells Josh Gardner why it's such an important guitar for him...

1 I love my…
"Cherry Red ES-335, it's my baby, we've been through a lot together."

2 How I got it…
"My first ever guitar was a second-hand Gibson SG, which I paid for by working countless hours meticulously flower arranging at my uncle's design warehouse in New York – very rock 'n' roll, I know. Upon us moving to London we were always strapped for cash, so my mum ended up pawning it in Cash Converters. When it was time to pay, we didn't have the money so I lost it just like that. I was devastated.

"Then when I finally got my hands on this 335 from Peter Cook's Guitar World in Hanwell it meant even more to me, I actually cried. There was no way I was ever letting this beauty leave my side."

3 It's special because…
"For me it's really the journey I've had with this guitar, it's a part of me. I've got much older perhaps better, cooler guitars, but for some reason this guitar still inspires me and surprises me all the time, especially recording with it. It's just got this particular warm tone that's instantly recognisable to my ear and I just play off that. I tend to gravitate more towards humbuckers I think. I just also prefer bigger guitars, semi and hollowbody guitars in particular, the way they resonate on you."

4 It's perfect for…
"It's a real workhorse to be honest, I'm rough and tough with it, I think you need to be a bit like that with guitars. I still bring it out on the road, though it's funny because I've been playing my ES-175 on various different projects and a 335 from Gibson Memphis as well recently, but when I do I actually feel guilty. I don't want her getting jealous."

5 It sounds best with…
"My Lazy J 20, which I take everywhere with me. Jesse Hoff who designed it absolutely nailed this amp. It's loosely modelled on a 50s tweed Deluxe but it really has its own sound and the way it works is really unique. You can get everything you need, tone wise."

6 Hear it on…
"You can really hear it letting rip on the new single, *Sweet Divide*. That's the 335 through the Lazy J, one guitar plugged straight in, no effects, no overdubs. That combination is all over this new album."

The Magic Numbers' new album, *Outsiders*, is released 11 May on Role Play Records

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Eric Gales

"I can't believe the amount of tone and power that my DV Mark amp produces for me!"

DV "RAW DAWG" EG

Eric Gales partnered with **Marco De Virgiliis** to create the **DV Mark Raw Dawg EG** signature head. That's the perfect amp to let him get a powerful, dynamic and warm clean channel where he can create his tone together with his favorite pedals. It features a single tube driven channel and a 250 watts power amp, that's what Eric needs to deliver his heavenly music.

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: getting out of the house, single-pickup joy and a whole lotta single-cut love...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

GOMM BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

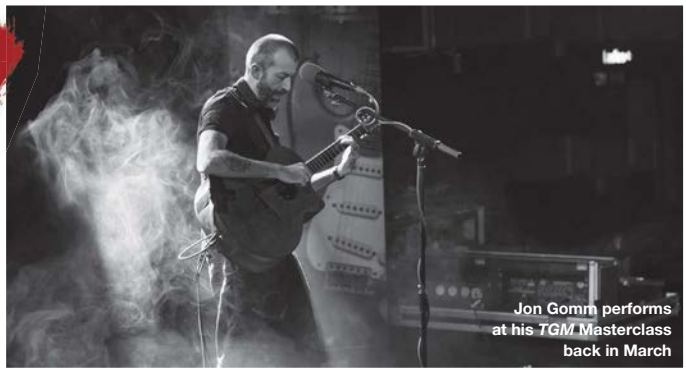
Dear Chris and company, I attended your Guitar Masterclass event in London with Jon Gomm back in March, and I just wanted to drop you a line to thank you for putting on such a fantastic evening. I don't make it down to London very often given my location and a variety of health issues, but since I first saw Jon play *Passionflower* on YouTube I've been totally captivated by the way he plays, and so I felt like it would be worth the hassle and the cost to come down and see him do something a little bit different to a standard gig – and boy was I not disappointed!

The Dingwalls venue was in such a good location in Camden, and the set-up inside was so relaxed and informal – totally different to a standard gig or masterclass-type thing. I don't know if the vibe made Jon more at ease, but he was absolutely incredible – watching him do his thing up close like that was totally inspirational, and the step-by-step way that he went through every aspect of his technique for us, and explained how he came up with it, and the influences he drew on to get there… it was just fantastic! I came away with loads of massively helpful advice that I'm going to apply to my own (much more rudimentary) acoustic playing – I'm not sure if I'm ready to stick banjo tuners on my Taylor just yet though!

I really hope this is something you'll do more of in the future – I'd love to see you do a similar thing with some of my other guitar heroes, like Mark Knopfler, Richard Hawley or Tommy Emmanuel. Keep up the good work!

Steve Davidson, Kendall

TGM **Thanks for your kind words, Steve, we're glad you enjoyed the Masterclass with Jon – it was a really great evening, and we certainly learned a few things about the mechanics behind his remarkable percussive acoustic technique, hopefully everyone else who attended did too! We should also thank all of the fantastic *TGM* readers who attended all of the Guitar Masterclass 2018 series – the evenings with Jon, Guthrie Govan and Darrel Higham were all very different, but equally fun and fantastic – and much of that is down to you for turning up and creating such great atmospheres for the artists and us to work with. Hopefully we'll see even more of you at our next event!**



Jon Gomm performs at his *TGM* Masterclass back in March

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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PAUL RIGHT NOW

Dear *TGM*, it must seem that I do nothing but carp and complain but credit where it's due, your articles on improving tone are absolutely the pooches' privy parts! Last month's issue featured and article on improving a Les Paul's tone and I still keep an earlier edition on a similar theme which has nigh become my bible. I have a black '61 Les Paul but always fancied a Sunburst so when the widow of a close friend offered me an early Orville body bought as a project, I stumped up the wonga.

Following the hallowed advice I fitted the genuine PAFs I had been hoarding along with an original 50s aluminium bridge and stop piece. A proper bone nut, Grovers that rather confusingly look like Klusons, Soviet oil and paper caps, a rewire to 1950s spec (I even started top wrapping my strings!), and everything was finished off with a Bigsby.

Individually, each change makes little difference but cumulatively the difference is huge. This was proved when I took the guitar to an event at a local shop, a sort of Les Paul gathering. Word had it there was a genuine 50s beast in the room. Over the evening instruments from all eras featured and when the Orville hit the stage with a Snark obscuring the logo, chins were stroked and the knowing nodded. Most agreed that here was the genuine article. Ahem!

So thanks once again for providing such fantastic advice – it certainly helped make my LP-style guitar stand out from the crowd!

DE Siddon, via email

LES IS MORE

Dear *TGM*, thanks for publishing my letter last month – I really wasn't planning to write to you again so soon, but as a Les Paul obsessive I have to congratulate you on the myth-busting tone article. It is so easy to get sucked into the minutiae of detail, but those of us who cut our teeth in the 70s and 80s already knew about the massive change a different set of pickups can induce.

I have been fortunate to acquire a 2007 Custom Shop R9 – beautiful wood, but there has been something lacking to my ears (it competes with a 2004 Standard Faded with House Of Tone bridge pickup that was the subject of my letter last month).

I was all set to try the pickup height trick, but your experiments with polepiece heights following the Duggie Lock Burst Vintage Bench Test were intriguing.

So I put it to the test, raised the neck pickup, lowered the bridge and adjusted the polepiece heights. Good grief, what an impact – and I must admit to a healthy dose of scepticism – much more bite and clarity in the bridge, and a real honkiness in the middle position that was not there at all before, previously very lacklustre, while the neck is fine just raised slightly.

I am also very fortunate to have as my number one guitar a PRS McCarty SC594 – a fabulous instrument, but again the bridge was just missing something with the 58/15LT pickup, I had got more bite by raising it, but now I did the reverse – lowered it back to it's original position and raised the polepieces. Just WOW, again that honkiness in the middle and increased bite and girth in the bridge. What a revelation!

In my 43 years of playing I have never had the opportunity to play an original Burst in anger, but I don't

feel the need to search for vintage pickups as the sounds I'm hearing stack up well against my Bloomfield, Allman Brothers and 'Beano' albums. I also admit to a degree of scepticism regarding the long tenon, but then the 594 has a tenon that runs the width of the pickup cavity, and it sustains for days, so maybe there is something in that, too. What a fabulous and informative article, well done Huw Price!
Takis Koutsoumanis, via email

TGM **Thanks to you both for your kind words about last month's LP-focused issue. Even as we were putting the Transform Your Les Paul feature together, we were absolutely floored by the sonic difference these seemingly inconsequential mods and part-swaps made to the tone of Huw's test guitars, and several members of the team have been scouring eBay for vintage Gibson hardware to mod their own instruments ever since!**

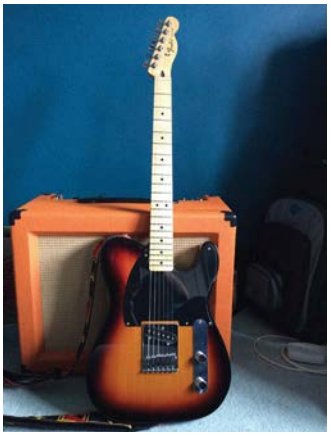
ONE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

Hi *TGM*, I've always fancied the idea of owning an Esquire but never particularly liked the idea of having vintage frets or a 7.25-inch radius fretboard. Anyway, just before Christmas I treated myself to a used MIM Telecaster and an Oil City Alligator 90 pickup, plus a few other bits and bods with the aim of putting together an Esquire-alike.

At the risk of upsetting the purists, I decided to retain a six-saddle bridge and to dispense with the usual Esquire circuitry (hence the RockRabbit control plate sans blade switch). The bridge is a Gotoh item with steel saddles and is a noticeable improvement over the original. Sadly, my DIY skills border on the nonexistent so a local tech put everything together for me.

I've only had it just over a week, but first impressions are really very good indeed. The guitar is very resonant and the Alligator 90 pickup goes from smooth to very snarly with everything in between. The RockRabbit control plate gives the kind of minimalist stripped-back look I was after (plus I don't keep accidentally knocking the blade switch), and the Gotoh bridge seems to give a clarity and definition that the original lacked. And importantly, as appearances matter to shallow guitarists like myself, I think it looks fantastic!
Gary Alexander, via email

TGM **Nice guitar, Gary. It's often said in the *TGM* office whether every guitarist should spend some time playing a single-pickup guitar at some point in their lives. There's a lot to be said for the way that stripping back your pickup-switching options makes you learn how to use your volume and tone controls to shape your guitar sound. Even if you end up going back to a more conventional multi-pickup instrument later on, the lessons you'll learn will be just as applicable to a regular arrangement, and will help unlock a whole wealth of sounds for you to enjoy, without ever having to step on a pedal or adjust your amp settings!**



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READER BOARDS

With more than 20 pedals on his impressive board, Tom Willey is prepared for pretty much every eventuality - but his 'box of crayons' is also designed to sound great at lower volumes...

KIT LIST

Tom Willey

PEDALS IN ORDER

Morley A/B/Y

- **A SIDE**
  DigiTech FreqOut, Catalinbread Manx Loaghtan, Creation Audio MK 4.23, Peterson Strobostomp, Dunlop Crybaby From Hell, Xotic BB Preamp (Andy Timmons Signature), Loop-Master Clean/Dirty Effects Switcher w/ Bypass
- **RHYTHM LOOP**
  Rimrock Mythical Overdrive, Catalinbread Galileo MK I, Catalinbread Dirty Little Secret MK III (Super Bass Mode), Catalinbread Dirty Little Secret MK III (Super Lead Mode)
- **LEAD LOOP**
  Catalinbread Manx Loaghtan, BK Butler Tube Driver, JHS AT Andy Timmons Signature Drive,

(continued opposite…)

What inspired you to create this board?

"I like having a lot options – it's like a giant box of crayons! I grew up in the 1980s during the hair band/shredder era, but also loved the classic rock of the 60s and prog-rock sounds of the 70s. So with that in mind, I strove to create a rig that could cover all those different bases. I also like to tweak my pedals on the fly, which is why I went with separate floor pedals as opposed to using multi-effects units or digital modellers – I don't want to have to deep dive into a preset just to add a little gain or lower the treble!"

Tell us about the journey you went on to create your board…

"I play for the band at my church, and the biggest challenge was getting big amp sounds in a low volume setting. I loved using tube amps, but could never turn up them up loud enough to sound good in that environment, so instead I tried to find pedals that could replicate the cranked sound and response of my favourite classic amps at more reasonable volumes. The Catalinbread Foundation overdrive and the JHS AT [Andy Timmons' signature overdrive] are great pedals for getting those sounds. When you have those two, it's like having a Vox AC30, a Marshall Super Bass, a Marshall Super Lead, and a Mesa/Boogie Lone Star all on stage with you at the same time – and they respond to boosts and fuzz pedals almost like the real thing."

Is there anything about the board that you'd like to change?

"Well, I think I've gone a whole six months without changing anything – a new record! Down the road I may consider a more sophisticated loop switching system – probably from TheGigRig or something similar. The Loop-Master Clean/Dirty switcher with Master Bypass box I use now works well though – I can select between a rhythm loop or a lead loop, each with a choice of low, mid, or high gain, or I can bypass all the overdrives completely for my clean sound."

What guitars and amps do you find work the best with this board?

"Well, I have nine Strats with various pickup and hardware configurations - so they certainly do a job! Then I also have an Epiphone Dot Deluxe, and a LTD KH-202 for when I want to get in touch with my inner 80s metalhead! For amps, I actually use a Fender Mustang IV 2x12, which probably sounds silly, as it's a modelling amp with built-in effects, but I don't actually use any of that stuff. Instead I use it as a clean base sound – I basically dial it in to sound just like my real Fender Twin from home. It has a stereo effects loop so I can actually run my TC Electronic SCF in stereo, plus it also has XLR outs with independent output control, which makes my soundman happy!"

What lessons have you learned putting this pedalboard together?
"I'd say the most key one is that the true test of any pedal is how it sounds in a band setting. I've bought pedals that sound great at home, but the minute that you play out live they disappear in the mix, or sound muddy. Another really useful lesson that I've learned is to never skimp on patch cables. One patch cable may not change your tone much, but when you multiply the effect over a large number of pedals, it will make a real difference. And then, finally, I've also realised that you shouldn't expect that a piece of gear will work for you just because your favourite guitar player uses it and swears by it – everyone's has a different sound in their head, so experiment for yourself and let your own ears be your guide."

Want us to feature your pedalboard in the mag? email the details and an image of the board to: theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com

(continued from opposite…)
Catalinbread Belle Epoch,
Fender Volume Pedal

- **BYPASS LOOP**

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EHX Deluxe Memory Man,
TC Electronic Nova Delay,
Catalinbread Echorec,
Toadworks Barracuda Flanger,
Mr Black Eterna Gold Reverb,
Clinch FX EP-Pre,
Strymon El Capistan
IN AMP LOOP
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New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

Manic Street Preachers
RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

The Manic Street Preachers hold something of a unique place in the British rock landscape. They're a band almost unrecognisable from the subversive enfants terrible who burst onto the scene in the early 90s, but despite their current status as beloved elder statesmen, the Blackwood trio have never looked like retiring into the comfortable sedan chair of the 'legacy band'. That said, the four-year wait between *Resistance Is Futile* and 2014's *Futurology* is the longest gap in the Manics' 13-album canon, and bassist Nicky Wire admitted last year that while they were working on the album, if they didn't feel it was good enough, it wouldn't come out.

But come out it has, and in contrast to the glamtastic vibes of *Futurology*, *Resistance Is Futile* sees James Dean Bradfield hone back in on a sound that's very reminiscent of the band's commercial apex – *Everything Must Go*. It's something that's evident from metronomically picked intro to opener, *People Give In* – the way the soaring orchestral strings welcome the punch of Bradfield's distorted guitar is so comfortingly familiar you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd put on a late-90s demos and rarities compilation instead. The looking back continues on lead single *International Blue*, which also gives Bradfield an opportunity to demonstrate that he remains one of Britain's finest modern rock guitarists, with a cascading lead riff and Slash-winking solo that both heavily channel his sublimely sleazy work on *The Holy Bible*.

But for an album that clearly wants to hark back to times gone past, it's actually quite varied and different. *Vivian* sets its stall out as something of a forgettable piano ballad before one of the catchiest riffs Bradley's written in years transforms the song into a breezy slice of pop-rock. *Dylan And Caitlin* meanwhile, sees JDB delving into his locker and pulling out some 70s soul vibes to underscore this foot-tapping duet about Dylan Thomas.

That's not to say there aren't missteps – *Hold Me Like A Heaven* lays the cool 80s processed guitar tones on thick but is undone by an overabundance of intrusive choirs, while closer, *The Left Behind*, would be a cool moody blues underpinned with 12-string chime… if not for Wire's inevitably polarising lead vocal.

Resistance Is Futile might not capture the glory of their 90s pomp, but it sprinkles enough Manics magic into the mix to make this a worthwhile entry in their recent canon.

Gareth John

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Suede, Ash, Embrace*

Jack White
BOARDING HOUSE REACH

Jack White is nothing if not an eccentric – as his various career left turns since The White Stripes attest – and he's at his most leftfield in a while on *Boarding House Reach*. He's having a good time with it, too. Just listen to the funky conga-driven *Corporation* – it's a little bit on the corny side, but if you don't smile when White's glitchy fuzz carves across the top of it, you may want to check your pulse. This is also White's most experimental solo album yet – leftfield electronic sounds dominate proceedings, though sometimes his desire to make weird noises may illicit as many snorts of incredulity as they do chuckles of delight. White doesn't forget to remind us why he's probably the greatest living riff writer on the planet, however – *Over And Over And Over*'s thumping beat is the perfect bedrock for the spitting fuzzy classic rock riff, and is probably the closest the record gets to old-school Jack. It's certainly not the dominant vibe, however – many of the other tracks here feel like a series of ramshackle hip-hop flavoured jams featuring organs and vintage synth sounds, but a foot-tapping riff or a noisy angular solo never far away. For fans of White's garage-rock heyday, this might prove a challenging listen, and it certainly meanders to its conclusion, but you can't expect an artist as prolific as this to stand still. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *St Vincent, The Dead Weather*

Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats
TEARING AT THE SEAMS

When Nathaniel Rateliff put together The Night Sweats in 2015, there was no more appropriate record label for the soulful R&B outfit to be on than Stax. This third full-length is a case in point – from almost the first horn stab of opener, *Shoe Boot*, there's a sense of pure authenticity to proceedings that wraps around you like a blanket and refuses to let go throughout the album's 12 tracks. It's a testament to Rateliff's abilities as a vocalist and his knack for a hook that you find yourself singing along to *Tearing At The Seams* almost immediately – the timeless melodies on the likes of *A Little Honey* offering a rose-tinted kaledescope of 60s-vibed rhythm and blues that somehow still feels fresh. Rateliff's guitar work is understated and complimentary, but hugely endearing. *Say It Louder*'s crystaline country-vibed vignettes are the perfect embodiment of this – providing delicate framing to the horns and organ, without ever hogging the limelight. Indeed, despite his name being at the top of the bill, this is clearly a band record. "I want – and I need – everybody to feel like they're a part of this band" the frontman says of this album. "I want them to feel like they're contributing artistically and emotionally to the experience." And what a wonderful experience it is for the rest of us. **JG**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Leon Bridges, Dan Auerbach, Kevin Morby*

The Wonder Years
SISTER CITIES

It feels somewhat reductive to label The Wonder Years as 'pop-punk for grown-ups' – as is often the case – but its a fitting description of their ability to capture everything that makes that genre enjoyable without the infantile lyrics or simplistic structures that give it a bad reputation in some circles. Dan Campbell is one of modern punk's most eloquent lyric writers, and *Sister Cities* once again finds him exploring his own anxiety and depression, with the isolation of life on the road a common touchstone throughout the record. As ever, however, the rest of The Wonder Years are here to elevate his words with a deftness of musical touch that their peers can only dream of. A common joke about the band is something along the lines of 'why does a pop-punk band need three guitarists?' But time and again, the guitar triumvirate of Matt Brasch, Casey Cavaliere and Nick Steinborn demonstrate the wisdom of their approach. *It Must Get Lonely* is a case in point – Brasch's jangling rhythm guitar providing Steinborn and Cavaliere with a ley line through which to weave a mix of searing delay lines and intricate motifs in perfect harmony. Confessional and tempestuous, with a level of musicianship and depth of song structure rarely seen by this kind of band, *Sister Cities* reaffirms TWY's place at the top of the pop-punk pyramid. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Taking Back Sunday, Jimmy Eat World*

Adam Miller
THE DEFINING OF SUCCESS

Australian Adam Miller is more commonly known as a fingerstyle player and tutor, but as his latest release reveals, he's another world-beating player adding to the growing lustre of modern instrumental music. With help from Snarky Puppy and Vulfpeck, instrumental music is enjoying a resurgence as of late. Following his extensive touring schedule, Adam is only adding to its popularity. Opening the album in the unusual key of B major, *Love* is an ode to Adam's wife. Lilting guitar lines are reminiscent of *Continuum*-era Mayer, before moving into the simpler, more melancholic blues of *Home*. As we progress through the tracklist it becomes more rhythmic and groove driven, starting with the jazzy *Drugs*. *Fight* opens up into apreggiated rock similar to Chon, but its potential doesn't quite feel fully realised. *Lawn* is of a similar ilk, reminiscent of a Bonamassa-esque sketch, although the reverse guitar lines are a welcome addition. Album closer *Conquer* is the standout track – a slow builder that begins in a minor key, before twisting its way around the melody into the major. Over seven minutes, it touches on polyrhythms and blues turnarounds, without feeling laborious. Adam says *The Defining Of Success* is the idea that success is always changing, but in his case, it's just on its way. **SR**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Snarky Puppy, Tommy Emmanuel, Chon*

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

ALSO OUT THIS MONTH

Our pick of the best of the rest of this month's guitar releases

Danny Bryant
REVELATION
The British blues guitarist returns with his most personal record yet. Powerful riffs and searing solos abound

The Magic Gang
THE MAGIC GANG
Brighton four-piece weaned on a diet of four-part harmonies and Weezer bring hooks galore on their debut record

The Breeders
ALL NERVE
The 90s alt-rockers return with a short, sharp slice of noisy, hooky rock anchored by guitar twins Kim and Kelley Deal

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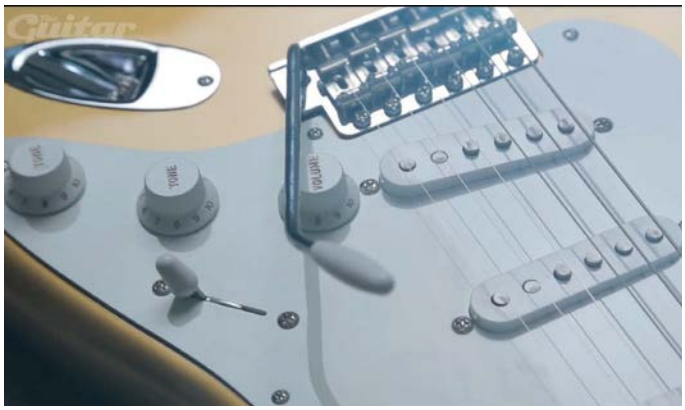
Tweed fans will love this shootout of five different 1950s Fender amps that showcases the evolution of Leo's amplifers over the decade

The Bros Landreth guitarist and solo artist Ariel Posen takes us on a tour of his Suhr, Collings, Two-Rock and Victory-loaded live rig

We sat down with Darrel Higham before our first Guitar Masterclass event to talk to the rockabilly ace about his Gretsch Custom Shop 5170

Get your ears around this pair of angry fuzzboxes from KMA Audio Machines – the Minos and the Fuzzly Bear

Chris Vinnicombe demos Fender's brand new-for-2018 American Original '50s Stratocaster and '60s Telecaster

Orange's Brent Hinds Terror was reviewed last issue, and our YouTube channel features a full demo of the Mastodon star's signature amp

You can read our review of Fender's new pedal range in The Joy Of FX, but head to YouTube to check out our demo of the delay and reverb!

Josh Smith is one of the finest guitarists in the world today, and here he walks and plays us through his live guitars, amps and pedalboard amp

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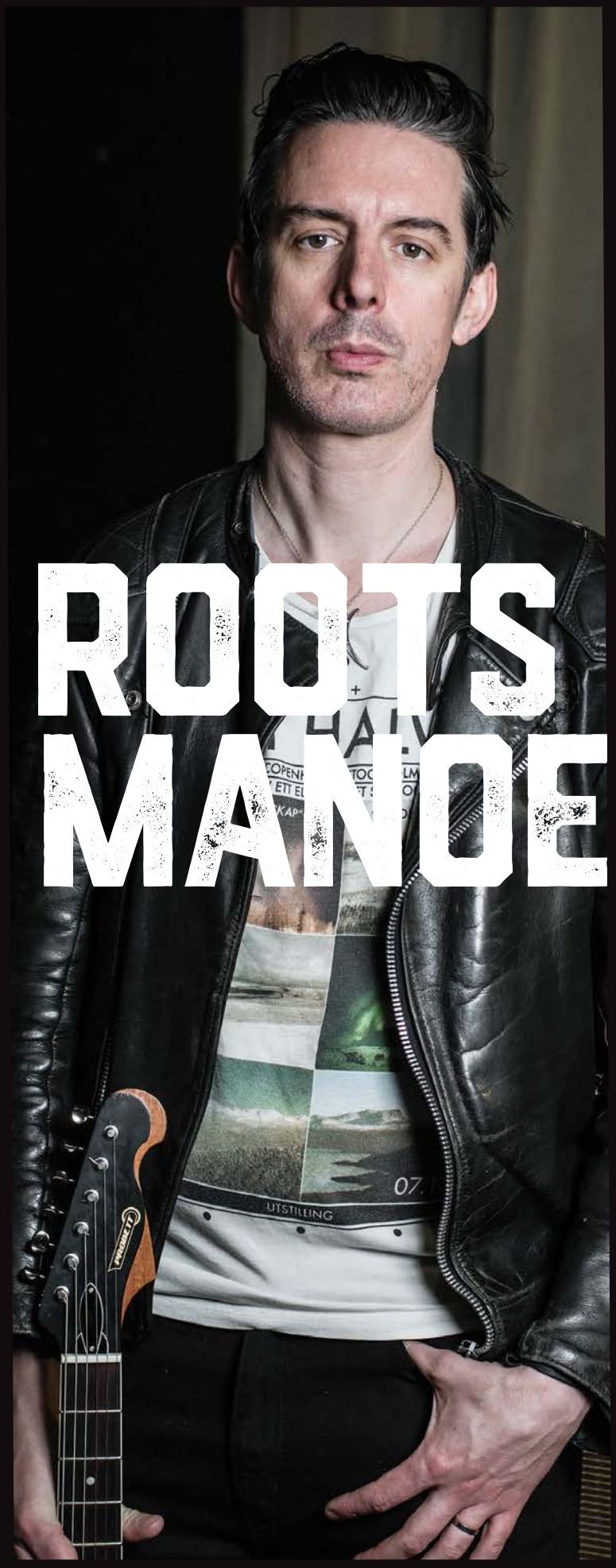


ROOTS MANOEUVRES

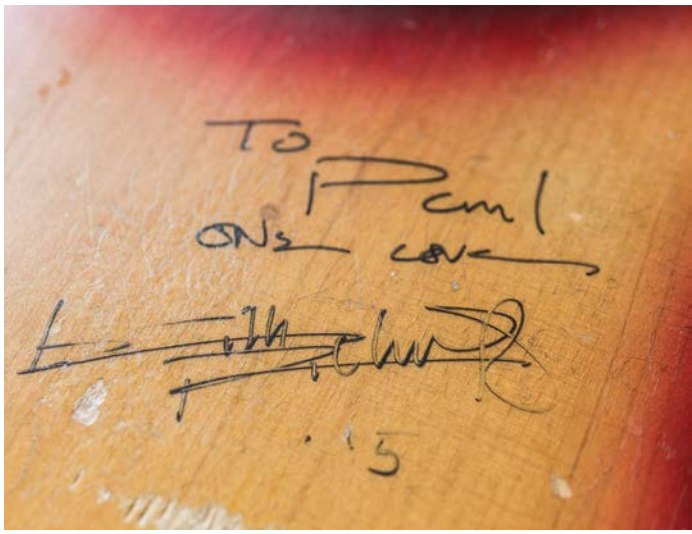
Losing two founding members could prove a fatal wound for lesser bands, but The Temperance Movement have come back stronger than ever. Thea de Gallier talks to guitarists Paul Sayer and Matt White and bassist Nick Fyffe about their chart-bothering revival...

Photography ELEANOR JANE

It's not unusual for bands to find themselves at a creative crossroads as they settle into their careers. The Temperance Movement are no exception; as the buzz around them began to grow after two albums, they found themselves navigating the American rock market, and being pulled in different directions by conflicting musical obligations.

It was January 2017, and the time had come to begin writing their third album. Guitarist Luke Potashnick and drummer Damon Wilson had left the band the year before, but replacements had been found quickly in the form of long-term friends Matt White, a session guitarist, and Simon Lea. The line-up change, though, wasn't what stalled progress; it was the increasing pressure to write in a way that would appeal to their new US fans.

"The feeling of being unsure of what direction to go in wasn't so much about the other guys leaving," explains lead guitarist Paul Sayer. "We were touring in America a lot and we had a lot of options available to us, there was a lot of information going in and it wasn't helping us make a decision about what to do next. Getting radio play on different types of radio stations in America can lead you down a bit of a rabbit hole of thinking that you have to



write songs for that kind of format, which didn't sit very well with us. But at the time we were surrounded by a lot of people who were telling us that was the sensible thing to do. It wasn't malicious, it wasn't a cigar smoking executive, that was their job. It made us stagnate a bit because it didn't feel natural."

Shortly after Matt and Simon's appointment, the band made the decision to stay true to their roots. "It was the moment that we realised that we needed to just make an album that we wanted to make, in the same way that we did right at the start," says Paul. "That was kind of what the band had been built on. As soon as we realised that it happened really quickly and easily."

Their epiphany led to the band parting ways with the execs trying to push them down a more commercial route. "We fired them all!" laughs Paul. "Now we're on the same label everywhere excluding America. We had a specific record deal there and we've moved on from that – we've changed management as well."

> "WHEN I'M REALLY NOTICING THE INSTRUMENT I KNOW IT'S NOT RIGHT FOR ME"

A DEEPER SHADE

It was a strategy that paid off; *A Deeper Cut* peaked at number six on the UK Album Chart upon its release in February, which is no small feat for a rock band in a world where the charts are dominated by pop and electronic sounds.

Writing with a commercial audience in mind wouldn't have worked for The Temperance Movement anyway; their writing methods sound almost slapdash when Matt describes how they began fleshing out ideas for *A Deeper Cut*.

"Every song is different, sometimes it's just Phil writing at a piano, sometimes Paul brings in a fully-formed idea, or sometimes a bunch of us will go up to Glasgow and hammer stuff out. Or people sit on their own beavering away at home and present it to the group in a rehearsal. It all happens in different guises," he says.

"There's a little rehearsal room near where I live, and I like to go down there with a guitar and amp," adds Paul. "I book it for four hours and I just play. Sometimes I'll take a bit of gear that I haven't used much, I might buy a few bits at the start of writing an album, because sonically they might inspire me. I might take a pedal with me that I've never used before and just mess around for a few hours and see if it inspires me to write something, starting from a sonic place first."

The inspiration flows best when Paul's using a piece of equipment he feels comfortable with, rather than choosing a guitar based only on its sound or what one of his heroes managed to do it. "What I've learned over years of buying things that my favourite guitar players have, and sounding nothing like them, is that it's not really about that," he says. "There are loads of guys that I love their playing: Blake Mills, Joey Landreth, Nels Cline. But unless you hit the strings with the same velocity that your favourite guitar player is, you're not going to sound like them. Matt and I use the same amps and we sound totally different because we hit the guitar in a different way.

"It's finding a guitar that you have a relationship with; you'll be at your most creative if you're really comfortable. I feel like when I'm playing, the last thing I should be thinking about is the guitar. It's when I'm really noticing the instrument that I know it's not right for me. Ideally you want to forget about it and just make music."

CUT SOME RUG

Producer Sam Miller, who worked on the debut self-titled and on the second record, 2016's *White Bear*, is back at the helm for *A Deeper Cut*. Making the decision to write from their hearts also made studio time at Monnow Valley – which boasts one of Europe's biggest live rooms – remarkably simple; their studio rig was designed to reflect the live set-up, meaning they created a sound easily replicated on the road.

"We don't want it to sound like we're all in separate rooms switching sounds every section of a song, we want it to sound very organic so our live rig and studio rig are very closely related," says Paul.

"We always record as a live band anyway," adds Matt. "Obviously I wasn't involved in the first two albums but from what I understand we always record as a live band, even Phil doing vocal takes at the

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strymon

"I'D RATHER SACRIFICE THOSE DIFFERENCES IN SOUND THAN CHANGE GUITARS MID-SHOW"

same time [a s the instrumentals] Those things aren't very separate to us, the line's really blurred."

The main difference is Paul's preference for his '59 Strat in the studio, while he prefers to use a '69 Telecaster on stage. "I've found I'd rather have the consistency of one instrument for the gig, I'd rather sacrifice the differences in sounds between guitars and manipulate what I've got that than try and change guitars during the show," he says. "I've got a couple of old Strats on tour because I used them in the studio. On the album I end up using the Strat a lot, and I brought it away to work out whether I wanted to work it into the live show, but I've kind of gone back to my Tele. I like to try and keep it as simple as I can with the pedalboard as well, I've got an AnalogMan Sun Lion, which is a fuzz and a boost in one pedal, I've got a delay pedal for one song, a Leslie simulator for the other song, and a reverb pedal for another, and they're fixed sounds. I like the challenge of less stuff."

The Leslie simulator is there to satiate Paul's love of the Leslie speaker, which ended up being used on the track *Higher Than The Sun* after bassist Nick Fyffe began "messing around" with one in another studio.

"Since we made this album I want to start bringing one on tour, but they won't let me!" Paul laughs. While the cumbersome nature of a Leslie means it's not a great tour mate, one studio trick they do replicate live is the straight-to-desk guitar sound. While the band joke that Matt "spent the first four days of the tour on his hands and knees" because of his more complex pedal set-up, he at least managed to find a way of recreating the sound live.

SPACE INVADER

As well as his rig of two Lazy J 20 amps – which Paul also uses – a '63 Jazzmaster, his custom Probett Rocket and a Hahn 228 T-type, Matt also has a switching system which

makes it easy for him to bounce between a traditional set-up and sending sounds direct to the desk.

"I didn't want to compromise on the tones used on the album, but I didn't want to complicate things, so I got it made into a switching system that's really easy to use and sonically sounds better than the previous set. It's the best of both worlds. I wanted to manipulate a DI sound as well – we used a little pedal on the album called a [J HS] Colour Box, so I'm sending that to front of house through the switching system. It's kind of a revelation, but it's really easy it gives the sound a few different colours."

Of course, certain atmospheric effects need to be tailored to the cavernous nature of a live room, and it's the same with amp levels. "Live, you need to be aware of the space and what you can bring on the road,

"WE WERE AT RISK OF PULLING IT ALL APART TRYING TO FIND SOMETHING ELSE"

but also, in the studio it doesn't matter if one amp is twice the volume of another one," says Paul. "You just correct it in the mix, but you can't do that live, there needs to be some level of consistency."

Funnily enough, it was also venues – or rather, the fact that "it's not like we can't get 20 people to a big show", as Paul puts it, that made the band realise that creating a sound true to them was a better option than trying to create music designed for a commercial audience. He's right; their recent tour has seen them playing mid-level venues such as London's 2,300-capacity Forum in Kentish Town, and Paul thinks the cliche that rock is dead or being relegated to history's box of the uncool alongside leg warmers and flares ignores the fact that rock gigs don't struggle to pull in fans.

"We're playing great big gigs and we had a really good chart result with the album, so in amongst all that pressure we were feeling to change the music and make it bigger was the realisation that we need to appreciate what we had," Paul admits. "We had to realise how good things are for the band, making the

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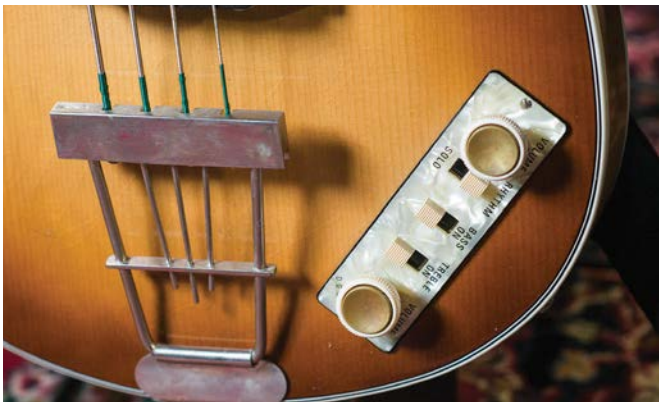
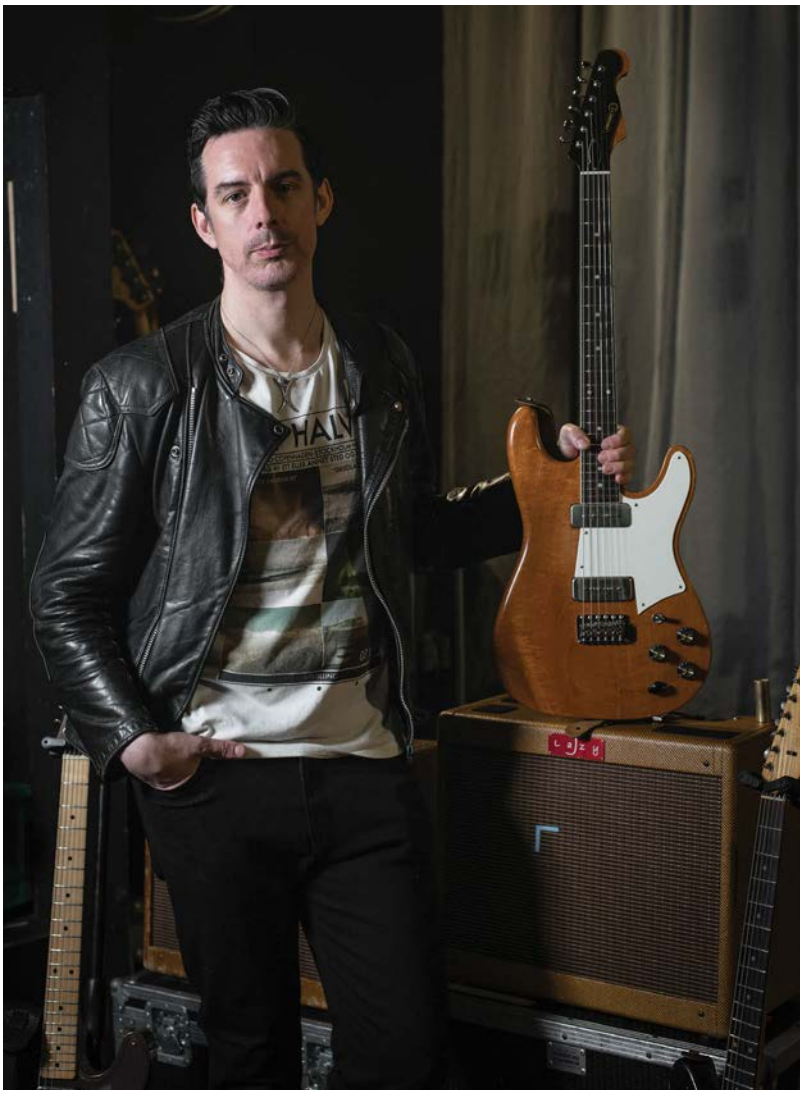


DEEPER AND DOWN

Bassist Nick Fyffe on his Big F-heavy live rig…

The Temperance Movement's bassist Nick Fyffe had a varied career before he joined that band – he played with Jamiroquai between 1999 and 2003, and has also performed with Deep Purple, Dhani Harrison and Robert Plant. But Although this Paul McCartney fan has a Violin Bass in his armoury, Fender year makes up the lion's share of his stripped-down rig: "I use Fender amps and speakers," says Fyffe. "I was using a valve head but I've recently switched to solid state because the valve head was too warm, and I wanted more definition. I play a P-bass, I've ordered one with a jazz neck on because my existing one has a very wide neck. Pedal wise I have a tuner and a fuzz pedal, that's it."



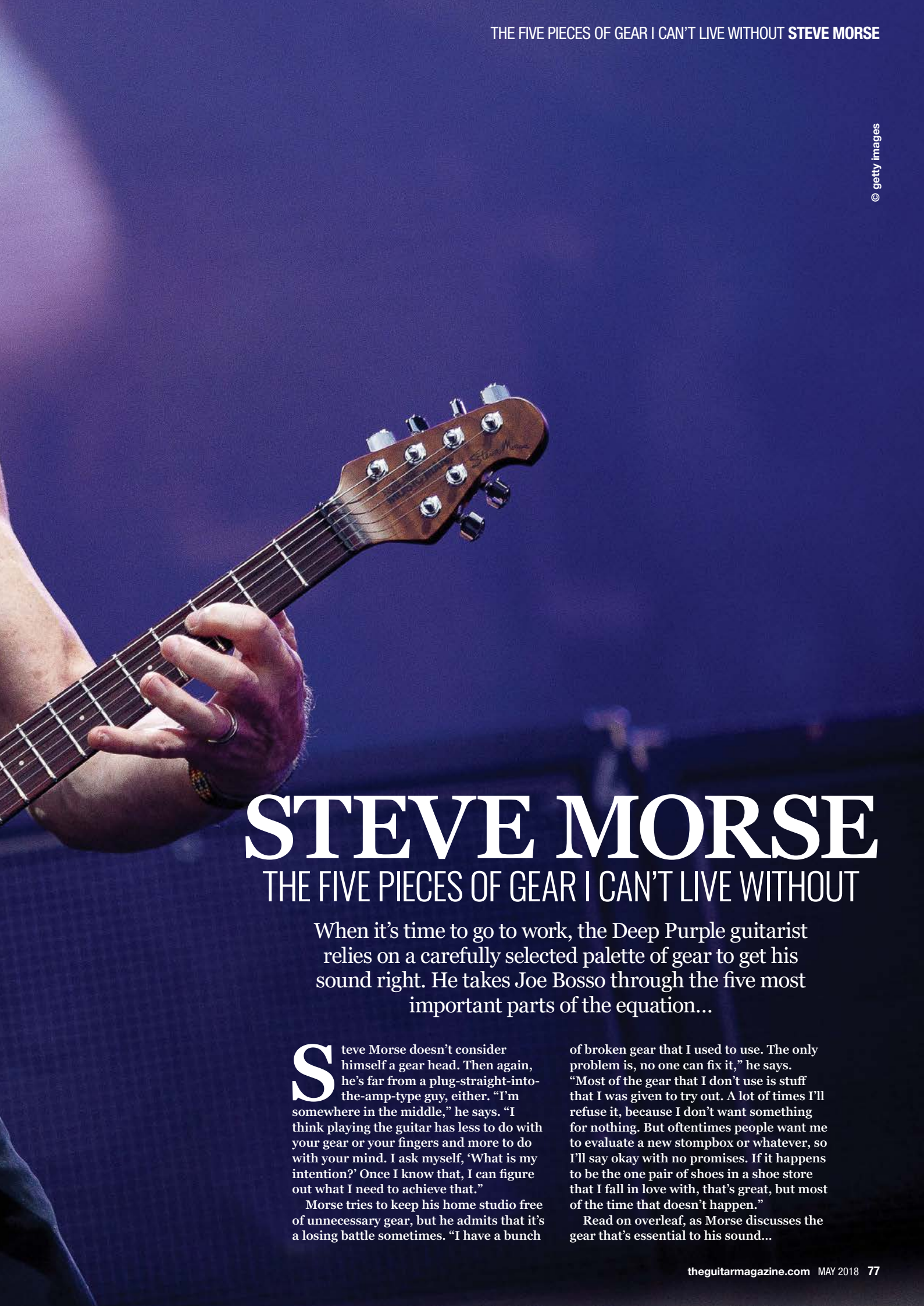
> "IT'S NOT THAT NOBODY WANTS ROCK MUSIC, IT'S JUST GETTING TO THOSE PEOPLE"

music that we do make. We were at risk of pulling it all apart in the process of trying to find something else. We had to sit and think, 'actually what's the problem?'"

TOP OF THE TREE

At the time of writing, in mid-March 2018, only eight rock artists had a top 10 album this year – Fall Out Boy, Joe Bonamassa, Simple Minds, Don Broco, The Wombats, Franz Ferdinand, Embrace and Breeders. Some of those have a nostalgic appeal, while others – Fall Out Boy and Don Broco – flirt with pop and electro sounds. On paper, The Temperance Movement are a band that shouldn't be charting; they're relatively new (hey formed in 2011) and they make retro blues-rock that embraces and stays faithful to its influences rather than flirting with more modern and mainstream sounds. They could have become that band if the business-minded former label team had their way, but as Paul – and the number six chart position – points out, their current formula was working all along.

"We've talked about this a lot since we released the album," Paul muses. "The mainstream music media is telling you that people making this kind of music are unfashionable, so you can't be successful making that music, but there are a thousand people every night in a room telling you the opposite. It's not that the music is unfashionable and nobody wants to hear it or see it, it's just getting to those people without the help of the industry. Look at the 90s when you had Nirvana and Pearl Jam and Oasis and all those bands. Those people haven't been wiped off the face of the planet because Radio 2 has suddenly decided that type of music is uncool. They're all there, it's just maybe more difficult to find them. We don't get passive audiences at shows who've been told to be a radio station or newspaper. We get the thousands of people who want to be there."



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STEVE MORSE

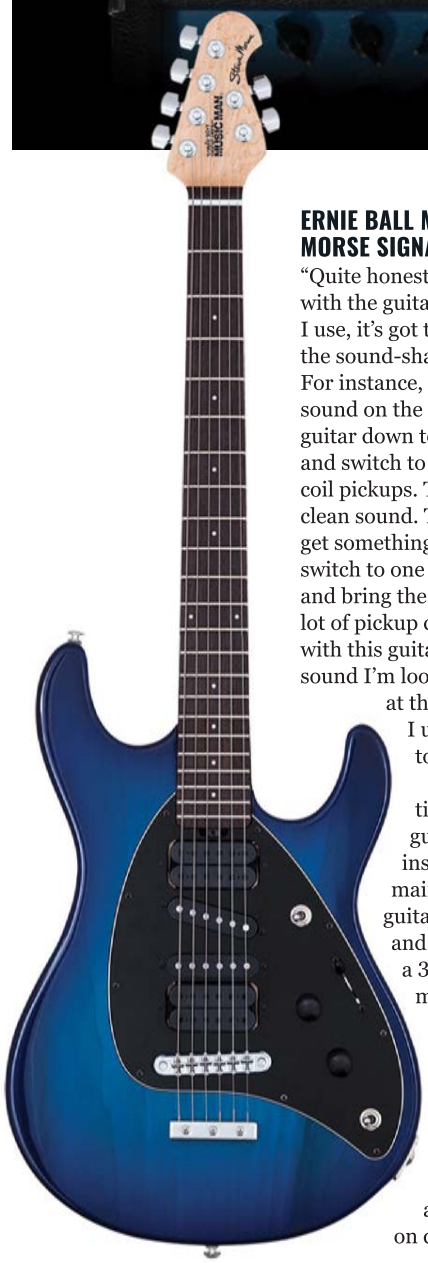
THE FIVE PIECES OF GEAR I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

When it's time to go to work, the Deep Purple guitarist relies on a carefully selected palette of gear to get his sound right. He takes Joe Bosso through the five most important parts of the equation...

Steve Morse doesn't consider himself a gear head. Then again, he's far from a plug-straight-into-the-amp-type guy, either. "I'm somewhere in the middle," he says. "I think playing the guitar has less to do with your gear or your fingers and more to do with your mind. I ask myself, 'What is my intention?' Once I know that, I can figure out what I need to achieve that."

Morse tries to keep his home studio free of unnecessary gear, but he admits that it's a losing battle sometimes. "I have a bunch of broken gear that I used to use. The only problem is, no one can fix it," he says. "Most of the gear that I don't use is stuff that I was given to try out. A lot of times I'll refuse it, because I don't want something for nothing. But oftentimes people want me to evaluate a new stompbox or whatever, so I'll say okay with no promises. If it happens to be the one pair of shoes in a shoe store that I fall in love with, that's great, but most of the time that doesn't happen."

Read on overleaf, as Morse discusses the gear that's essential to his sound...



ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN STEVE MORSE SIGNATURE MODEL

"Quite honestly, it begins and ends with the guitar. Out of anything that I use, it's got the most control over the sound-shaping possibilities. For instance, if I have a distorted sound on the amp, I can bring the guitar down to about two or three and switch to one of the single-coil pickups. That'll get a totally clean sound. Then when I need to get something a little dirtier, I can switch to one of the humbuckers and bring the volume up. There's a lot of pickup combinations available with this guitar, so pretty much any sound I'm looking for is available at the touch of my fingers. I use the volume and tone controls quite a bit.

"There are a lot of times I'll use my Y2D guitar, which is a terrific instrument, but the main guitar is my go-to guitar. It came out in 1987, and we're working on a 30-year anniversary model right now. The idea of doing my own signature model had been in my head for a while – I needed another guitar besides my number one 'Franken-Tele' – and I actually worked on different scenarios with three well-known companies. But everything came together the way I wanted with Ernie Ball. I had the DiMarzio pickups I wanted, in addition to all the other parts. It's such a versatile instrument. It really does the job for me."

> "My Music Man is such a versatile instrument. It really does the job for me"

ENGL STEVE MORSE SIGNATURE E656 HEAD

"It's rare that I get to specify my own amp if I'm sitting in with somebody, but I do like to have my Engl with me. Engl is a great German boutique amp company, and we came out with this signature amp. It's got tons of outputs in the back, it's super-versatile and reliable, and you can MIDI control many of the switch functions.

"At its heart, it's really a Class-A, simple tube amp, but I added a third channel to what I considered to be the best Engl clean and distorted sounds. The third channel has four different pots and a wide range of mid-range – the four controls are all for mid-range. You can really make your solos stand out this way and keep the sound musical. To me, having a more prominent mid-range is a pretty big deal.

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"People ask me if the numbers '656' in the model name actually mean anything. Well, no, they don't have any significance to me! Perhaps they mean something to Horst Langer, who's the amp's designer. I'm really happy with what we've come up with on this amp. If you play through it and your guitar doesn't sound incredible, then something must be wrong with your cord."

ERNIE BALL VP JR

"This thing is a totally indestructible, simple and ultra-classic piece of gear. I've used this since the early days of the Dixie Dregs. In fact, this is how I met Ernie Ball and his sons. I was playing a trade show and the volume pedal I was using crapped out on me. They loaned me one of theirs, and I loved it. The thing did the job, and it was built like a tank.

> "Whenever I get a new pedal, I can just go to the TC website and download my TonePrint"

TC ELECTRONIC FLASHBACK

"If I play a gig where I can use another amp, like a combo amp, then I like to add a TC Flashback Delay with my own TonePrint. It's an inexpensive and really good-sounding delay, and TC has allowed me to make my own preset in it.

"What's really cool is, whenever I get a new model, I can just go to the website and download my TonePrint. I put that into my phone, and then I hold the phone to one of the pickups, and that sends the information to the delay through the guitar cord. And it works, too! It's incredibly easy and wild.

"It's not a huge amount of information in computer terms, but to have it available on the dials would take a huge delay pedal. This is just a tiny little stompbox, and it's now jam-packed. It's really versatile, and it works well with the next piece of gear..."

TC ELECTRONIC POLYTUNE/ KEELEY COMPRESSOR

"This is a toss-up. If I'm sitting in with somebody and I'm playing a different guitar, I'd most want to have a digital tuner with me. However, if I were doing a gig where I had my own guitar, I would say my Keeley compressor. Ideally, I would like both!

"For sound-shaping, the tuner doesn't do anything – I have it on total bypass. It's really easy to read, and you can quickly strum all six strings – if you do it just right – and see the tunings of each string.

"The compressor pedal, when I use it with humbucking and single-coil pickups combined, gives me a super-funky rhythm sound. It sounds like something I'm very comfortable with. I used it on the new Deep Purple and Flying Colors albums. It's got two knobs and it's really easy to set up."

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GEAR REVIEWS

Chances are if you've made it this far through the issue, you've already read about the most talked about new guitar launch of 2018 – if not, turn to p10 and find out if all the hype around John Mayer's new PRS Silver Sky is justified. The rest of the gear in this issue might not have so much fanfare behind it, but with beautiful new electrics from Eastman and Echopark, gorgeous high-end acoustics from Lowden and Larson Bros, a fantastic blast from the past to celebrate Blackstar's 10th anniversary and a remarkable TS-style pedal from JHS, we're absolutely jam-packed with lovely stuff to tempt your wallets. Without further ado, let's dive in…

PRS Silver Sky **10**
John Mayer's much anticipated PRS signature model on test

Eastman T184MX **84**
A slimmed-down hollowbody with bags of character

Echopark Esperanto **88**
Boutique semi-hollow brilliance from Gabriel Currie

Blackstar Artisan 10 AE **90**
Blackstar revisits its first smash hit in scaled-down form

Larson Bros Prairie State OM Style 2 VS 1900 ..... **94**
A classic US guitar name gets reborn in France

Lowden S35-12 Cedar/Walnut & S35-12C Spruce/Cocobolo **98**
Two gorgeous Lowdens with a 12th fret neck join

Auden Bowman Bass **104**
Quality acoustic four-stringer from the British brand

JHS The Bonsai **106**
All the Tube Screamers you'll ever need in one pedal?

Tube Distinctions Power Works Pro TD2414PRO **108**
Extraneous noise? You may need to clean your electricity…

EASTMAN T184MX

Will the latest iteration of Eastman's compact hollowbody persuade our resident Electric Spanish addict that size isn't everything? Chris Vinnicombe gets some fresh air...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Regular readers will be familiar with the Eastman brand – 2017 saw us review stellar solidbody, hollowbody and acoustic models featuring the company's proprietary Antique Varnish aged finish, which comprises several thin coats of shellac. Although factory-distressed guitars have become de rigueur, not everybody wants a new guitar that looks beaten up straight out of the case. Eastman manufactures many instruments dressed in pristine gloss nitrocellulose, too – and our review guitar is just one particularly attractive example.

The compact and bijou T184MX has been in the Eastman line for some years now, but 2018 sees the model receive a series of refinements, one of the most significant of which is the presence of a pair of custom-wound Lollar Imperial humbuckers, superseding the previous Seymour Duncan 59s. The headstock has been slimmed down, too, and the less flared design here not only balances better with the body's compact 14-inch width but also provides a clearer path for the strings behind the nut. The Goldburst model is the first T184MX to feature these changes but they will be phased in on the other finishes throughout the year.

Gotoh SG301-04 tuners have been swapped out for more vintage-style Gotoh SD90 units with plastic keystone buttons – the trade-off is a slightly lower ratio of 1:15 rather than the previous 1:18 but the tuning performance on this example proves to be smooth and stable. Other hardware includes a Gotoh Nashville-style tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece and an old-school single action truss rod.

Like the majority of PRS, National and Danelectro electrics, the T184MX has a scale length of 25 inches, though the overall vibe here is obviously closer to something from Paul's boutique than a pawnshop. When subjected to careful examination, the standard of woodworking in some areas falls slightly short of the precision exhibited by the Maryland company, but the T184MX is still a very classy

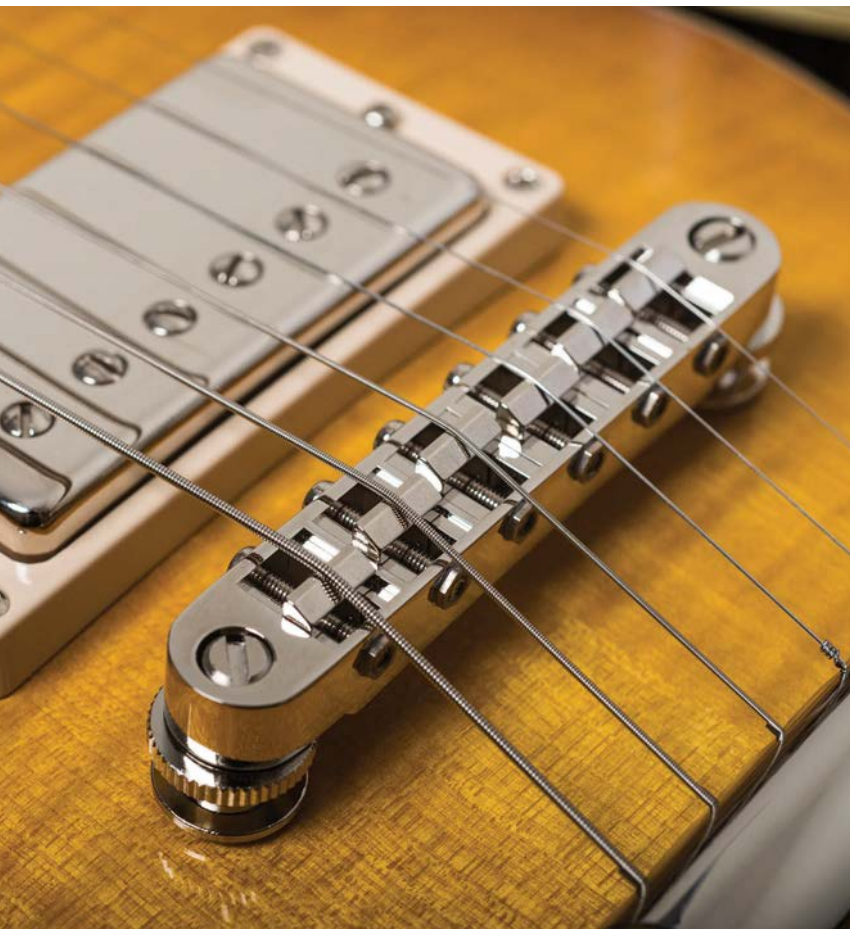
The guitar's internals are fully hollow aside from a mahogany block beneath the bridge

instrument of which Eastman is justifiably proud.

At first glance you might be forgiven for expecting the T184MX to be simply a scaled-down semi made from laminates, but it isn't. The thinline body features a two-piece solid maple top and two-piece solid mahogany back, both hand-carved from 17mm sections of timber and beautifully figured. The guitar's solid mahogany sides are steam pressed into shape (holding their shape after cooling) and the guitar's internals are fully hollow aside from a mahogany block beneath the bridge and tailpiece that's glued between raised sections of the carved top and back.

The neck is three-piece mahogany with two small additional 'wings' at the headstock's widest point. Along with the front and rear of the body, the ebony fretboard and headstock fascia are attractively bound with strips of flame maple. It's worth noting that even though the top is flame maple, the binding here isn't the scraped 'faux' variety – after the top and back are glued to the sides, a channel is cut and a piece of flame maple is bent into shape and glued.

IN USE

Downsized it may be, but the T184MX doesn't feel in any way

cramped. With its strap button situated on the upper horn, it hangs in a rather more perpendicular fashion than ES-335 players will be used to, but for Les Paul players it's closer to home. The 'Traditional Even C'-shaped neck profile is slim and comfortable and melts away immediately in the hand. Acoustically the T184MX is alive with overtones and resonance, so we expect the amplified performance to be similarly impressive.

Our previous experiences with Lollar Imperials have all been very satisfying and the blend of smoothness and airy high-end chime that Eastman has spec'd for the custom-wound set here perfectly complements the guitar's anatomical blend of warmth (mahogany back, hollow construction) and snap (maple top, ebony fingerboard, 25-inch scale). It's funny how certain instruments steer you down a particular road – this is no exception. The T184MX has 'expressive soloist' cruising through its veins and the temptation to noodle is impossible to resist.

Complex chord voicings, soulful grooves and melodic lead are all very well served but plain ol' first-position chords sound lovely, too, in all three pickup positions – with beautiful chime, depth and articulation. It's always a smooth ride, but never woolly. If guitars were nights out then this is certainly more of a sophisticated bottle of red and a cigar than it is 12 cans of Red Stripe and 20 B&H, but not so much wine that the evening begins to blur at the edges.

> Plain ol' first-position chords sound lovely, with beautiful chime, depth and articulation

A guitar like this won't match the woody depth of a large archtop, but with more and more modern jazz guitarists moving to smaller boxes or even solidbodies, if jazz fusion is your poison then this Eastman is well worth considering. Things can get dirty, too – although it's a hollowbody the T184MX's compact dimensions and the block connecting the top and back definitely help with feedback reduction. With overdrive at band volumes it's a lively experience – the onset of feedback is a little quicker than with an ES-335 but it's certainly easier to keep under control than an ES-330.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson Memphis's **ES-339** (**£2,599**) downsizes the ES-335 with maple/poplar/maple laminate and centre-block construction, while the **Gibson Custom CS-336** (**£3,899**) utilises a single piece of routed mahogany for the back and sides and a carved maple top. An all-mahogany version of the CS-336 (**£3,299**) is also doing the rounds. The **PRS S2 Custom 22 Semi Hollow** throws in a vibrato and can be picked up for as little as **£1,699**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Sophisticated and articulate tones that never get murky
+ Gorgeous top and back
+ Light weight and comfortable dimensions

– Minor cosmetic imperfections at the body end of the fingerboard

With much to offer fans of Larry Carlton and Robben Ford and plenty more besides, this is a fine guitar that rewards a cultured approach

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Eastman T184MX

- **PRICE** £1,999 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Carved maple top, carved mahogany back, mahogany neck with 'Traditional Even C' profile, 12" radius ebony fretboard with pearl dot inlays and 22 Jescar 47104 medium jumbo frets. Flamed maple body, neck and headstock binding
- **HARDWARE** Nickel Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, Gotoh SD90 tuners with plastic keystone buttons
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Lollar Custom Wound Imperial humbucking pickups, three-way toggle selector switch, 2x volume, 2x tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25"/635mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.6mm at nut, 52.6mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.6mm at nut, 51.2mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6.1lbs/2.7kg
- **FINISH** Goldburst nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments Europe **www.eastmanguitars.eu**

ECHOPARK ESPERANTO 313

An outrageously cool semi with Queens Of The Stone Age in its DNA and a neck to die for. Chris Vinnicombe takes one for the team...

The Esperanto (named after an invented language devised in 1887 by Polish physician and philologist LL Zamenhof) came about after Echopark mainman Gabriel Currie began working with Queens Of The Stone Age star Josh Homme back in 2013. "He commissioned five instruments, three of which were semi-hollow," remembers Currie, then based in Los Angeles but now building out of Detroit.

"We had the same tastes and leanings sonically so I went to work on a couple of ideas, twisting the design in a couple of ways to make it Echopark. I own an ES-330 from 1959 with a dot neck and it's got a perfect feel. He has a Casino from 1964 that we love too – it's really a combo of those two with the offset kinda design that is not as wide as an ES-335, not as bulbous, a little more feline…"

Having turned to Gibson's golden era for inspiration, Gabriel says that he studied the company's lamination technique from 1958 and found that "the centre lam is cross grain and the glue is very specific for that process – a resin type that is extremely rigid. I wanted to employ that because those late-50s semi-hollow instruments are just magical. I also went with a mahogany centre block versus maple and spruce kerfed lining for the top/back brace and sides as well as long steel bushings for the stopbar and a vintage reproduction of the non-wire ABR bridge with raw brass saddles."

In addition, Currie opts for a full neck tenon, "just like on a '58 Junior. Big, deep, long and set with fish glue." The result of all this is an instrument with wonderful acoustic ring and sustain with none of the slightly plunky, banjo-like response of even some of the best ES-335s. Strapped on, the 15.7-inch wide lower bout and 8.5-inch waist make for a feel that's a fraction more compact and the guitar balances perfectly, with no neck dive to fight against. Time to amplify…

> Through a 6V6 combo, there's a delicious dark sparkle here that bristles with harmonic complexity

IN USE

Dimensionally speaking, the Esperanto's neck is a monster – one of the deepest you're likely to encounter on a modern electric guitar. But it's worth reiterating that it's the shape of the carve that determines player comfort. Gabriel's V-to-D profile has very little shoulder and a smooth transition that complements the way your hand position changes as it moves up the neck. Along the way, access to all 22 of the guitar's medium-jumbo frets is a breeze.

Arcane pickups have consistently impressed us and these units are no exceptions. Through several flavours of 6V6 combo there's a delicious dark sparkle here that bristles with harmonic complexity. Situated where the bridge tone control would usually be, the coil split blend proves very useful and throughout its taper the voices are clear and mush-free. As you might expect from a guitar with a Josh Homme connection, the Esperanto handles dense overdrive with class and complexity, and driven lead tones have a fluid, vocal quality. Pretty or mean? You decide, the Esperanto does both very well.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Wonderful neck, playability and tones
+ From the colour to the pickguard and even the knobs, it looks a million dollars

– Minor finish imperfections
– Plastic body binding doesn't match the ivoroid celluloid used on the neck

Gabriel Currie knows the recipe for a great sounding and playing instrument. If only rock star guitars didn't come with rock star price tags!

8/10

KEY FEATURES

ECHOPARK ESPERANTO 313

- **PRICE** £6,899 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollow double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Maple laminate body with mahogany centre-block. Set mahogany V-D profile neck with 12-inch radius quartersawn pau ferro fingerboard. 22 Jescar 9055 frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style Kluson tuners, vintage-style ABR bridge with brass saddles, stop tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** Arcane Gold Coil (neck) and Echotron (bridge) pickups, 2x volume, master tone, coil split blend, three-way pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.0mm at nut, 51.3mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.8mm at first fret, 28.2mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.3mm at nut, 52.1mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.4lb/3.3kg
- **FINISH** Pelham Blue nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815
  www.coda-music.com
  www.echoparkguitars.com

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Gibson Memphis 1958 ES-335** (£3,289) from 2016 is still available at select retailers. Get 'em while you can! Much more affordable, the **Hutchins Chandler 6** (£450) is a Chinese-made semi with a similar outline to the Esperanto but a 25.5-inch scale length

BLACKSTAR 10TH ANNIVERSARY ARTISAN 10 AE

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Northampton's finest celebrates a decade in the game with an affordable combo inspired by the class of 2008. Chris Vinnicombe turns down the volume...

KEY FEATURES

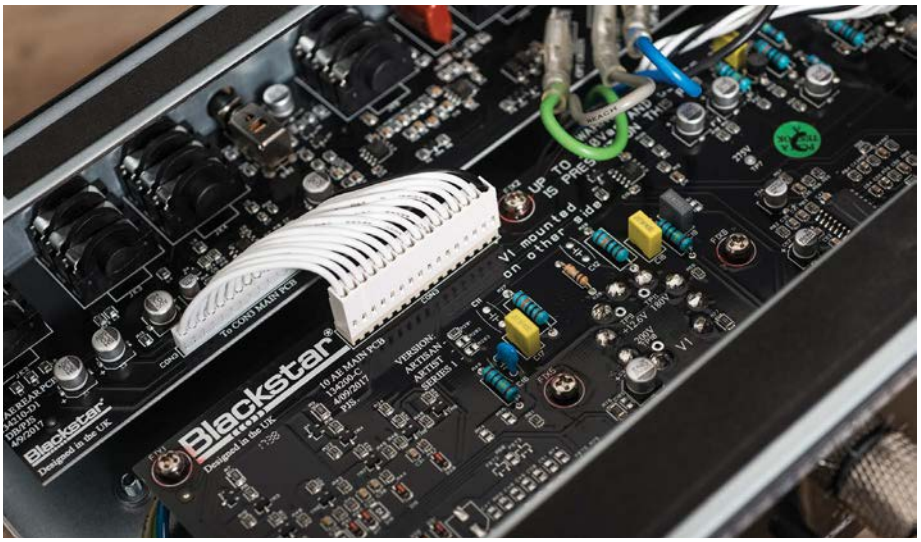
BLACKSTAR 10TH ANNIVERSARY ARTISAN 10 AE

- **PRICE** £499
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel, single-ended valve combo with footswitchable boost. Made in China

Last year saw Blackstar Amplification celebrate 10 years since its launch at Musikmesse 2007 in Frankfurt. During that time, Blackstar has gone from garden shed R&D to household name status in the guitar world, but the rich maroon vinyl covering on this 10th Anniversary combo harks back to the amplifiers that started it all for the Northampton-based company.

Designed in the UK by Ian Robinson and Bruce Keir, the original Blackstar Artisan models were launched to universal acclaim a little over decade ago. Despite offering beautiful tones and boutique stylings inside and out, Korean manufacture allowed the Artisans to hit the streets at price points that were extremely competitive. 10 years on, the hand-wired Artisan 15, 30 and 100 models are still available and now made in China to the same exacting specifications.

Part of a trio of affordable 10th Anniversary models (see p92 for



information on the other two), the Artisan 10 AE combo swaps tagboard for pin-sharp PCBs and birch ply for MDF but retains the elegant simplicity of its high-end forebears. The smart gloss-black, top-mounted control panel is home to just four main controls: volume, tone, reverb level and master. The single-ended circuit employs an ECC83/12AX7 in the preamp and an EL34 in the power amp, while a boost switch (engaged either via the control panel or supplied footswitch) adds an additional gain stage into the mix.

Around the back, a trio of speaker outputs facilitates the connection of the internal 16-ohm Celestion Seventy 80 loudspeaker and/or a variety of eight- and 16-ohm extension cabinets. There's also a speaker-emulated output that doubles as a headphone out. For silent practice or recording, the emulated output still functions when you switch the amplifier into standby mode.

IN USE

Powering up illuminates the large red jewel light, which ties in with the combo's tasteful retro aesthetic. As is so often the case, the small but considered array of controls on board here can unlock an enormous range of sounds. Set clean, the appropriate adjective is 'pretty' – clean tones are smooth but transparent enough to retain the detail and nuances in your instrument and your playing.

The onboard digital reverb is subtly voiced and offers a halo of ambience rather than salty splashes of surf – it can get a little hissy when rolled much past noon but with more restrained settings it's a pleasing effect that would be missed if it wasn't there.

> The small but considered array of controls can unlock an enormous range of sounds

Balancing the relative output levels of the Artisan's two modes can be a little tricky. When you step on that preamp boost switch you get a generous helping of extra level as well as gain, but there's so much mileage in this mode that you might not want to switch it off.

- **POWER RATING** 10W
- **VALVES** 1x ECC83/12AX7 (preamp), 1x EL34 (power amp)
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input, volume, boost on/off, tone, reverb, master, standby, power on/off
- **REAR PANEL** Emulated output (mono, post-power amp), series effects loop, effects loop level (+4dBV/-10dBV switchable), send, return, footswitch (FS-4 single-button footswitch supplied), 3x speaker outputs
- **SPEAKER** 1x12" Celestion Seventy 80
- **DIMENSIONS** 473 x 421 x 251mm
- **WEIGHT** 14.9kg/32.8lbs
- **OPTIONS** FS-8 two-button footswitch (£24.99)
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817 **www.blackstaramps.com**

With the boost engaged and the volume control rolled back to around 10 to 11 o'clock there's a tactile, organic raunch that's bags of fun in combination with a good Strat neck pickup. It's very Hendrix-y of course, but EL34 power stage notwithstanding, you can dial in satisfying Texas blues tones, too.

Flip to the bridge pickup with the same amp settings and the Britpop sounds of '66 and '96 are at your fingertips. Throw some humbuckers or P-90s into the mix and you're into classic rock grind, even at very restrained, home-friendly levels on the master volume control. That said, there's something about this amp makes up keep going back to the Strat – it's a truly infectious combination, even through headphones. Although in this context the drive tones can be a little coarse, the emulated output's clean tones are more than sufficient for late-night noodling – the reverb helps soften things up, too.

Thanks to its excellent master volume the Artisan 10AE is effectively two amps in one. If you're looking for sweet, boutique-style cleans and classic overdriven tones at living room volumes then this is would be a shrewd choice but what makes £499 seem like a serious bargain is the fact that it can also handle stripped-down gigs and rehearsals, and is a versatile weapon in the studio.

> If you're after boutique cleans and overdriven tones at living room volumes this is a shrewd choice

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender's Blues Junior (£609) is now in its fourth incarnation. Thanks to a pair of EL84 power-valves it's always had a mid-Atlantic accent and handles small gigs with ease. **Marshall's new Origin20C** (£559) is a Brit-voiced 20-watter that switches down to 10- and five-watt modes – look out for a review soon. If low-volume practice is paramount then check out the **Yamaha THR10C** £312 for a variety of living room friendly tones inspired by the classics

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ High quality clean and overdriven tones
+ Particularly impressive in combination with a good Strat
– Slightly heavy for such a compact cabinet

Boutique flavour at a bargain price; a fitting tribute Blackstar's first 10 years

9/10

POWER TRIO

The Artisan 10 AE is joined in Blackstar's 10th Anniversary series by two other compact 10-watt combos drawing on inspiration from the Artist and Series One ranges. The **Artist 10 AE** features a 6L6 output valve and an onboard overdrive circuit inspired by Blackstar's HT-Drive pedal, enabling you to get everything from big-bottle cleans to singing legato lead from one amplifier at volume levels suitable for the home or small stages. The **Series One 10 AE** employs a KT-88 power tube and Blackstar's ISF tone shaping to enable it to deliver tight high-gain drive tones and dynamic, pristine cleans. All three Blackstar 10th Anniversary models retail at a very reasonable £499 and are available now.

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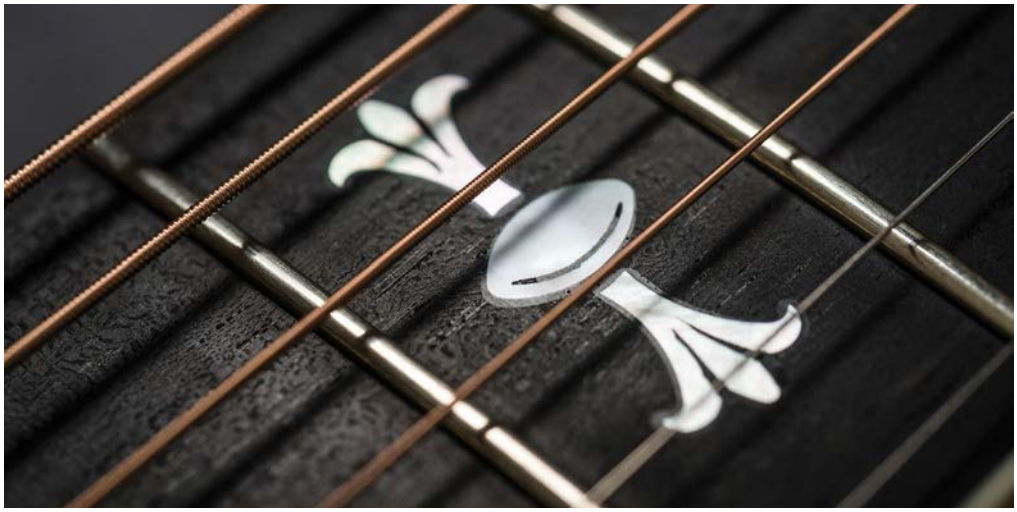


LARSON BROS PRAIRIE STATE OM STYLE 2 VS 1900

Swedish brothers Carl and August Larson crafted some of the most sought-after acoustics of the golden era, and now at last their guitars are back in production. Huw Price crosses State lines...

In the late 19th Century, Swedish immigrant brothers Carl and August Larson left their homeland and emigrated to Chicago. After a spell working as jobbing luthiers, they bought the Maurer guitar company and began making their own guitars. In addition to the brand name Maurer, the brother's guitars carried the names Euphonon, Stetson, Stahl, WLS, Larson and Prairie State. The Larsons competed against countless American guitar manufacturers, but two things set them apart. Firstly, their construction methods were highly innovative and secondly, their guitars were extremely good.

They produced a broad range of models, and since the guitars were all hand-built, there appears to have been little in the way of standardisation. However, two long-running features were arched tops, and the laminated braces that held them in tension. The brothers would sandwich a strip of rosewood or ebony between outer layers of spruce to create braces that were extremely stiff and strong yet thin and light. What's more, the Larsons always built guitars for steel strings.

Although never a household name such as Martin or Gibson, the Larson brothers could point to some celebrities on their client list and they are highly sought after among players and collectors today. Much of the appeal comes from their relative scarcity of these guitars, largely because the company folded upon the death of Carl Larson in 1946 – just two years after his brother.

Considering the number of defunct American guitar brands that have been revived in recent years, it's surprising that all things Larson related remained dormant for so long. This didn't escape the notice of Toni Götz of iMusicnetwork, who decided to find out who owned the rights.

> Original Larson acoustic guitars are highly sought after among players and collectors today

His company's lawyers consulted colleagues in America and discovered the Larson Brothers name was not in use, and therefore available for purchase. The legal transfer of the Larson Brothers of Chicago brand, including all postmortem rights, to iMusicnetwork took place in 2007.

With the legal side taken care of, Götz teamed up with Roman Zajicek, the master luthier of Rozawood Guitars in the Czech Republic. Together they accurately measured and laser scanned several original Larson guitars, then some early models were built.

Then in 2012, Götz met respected French luthier Maurice Dupont, who knew the Larson history and was inspired by the idea of recreating their guitars. Since 2013, Dupont and his team have been building Larson acoustics in Boutiers Saint Trojan, near the city of Cognac.

Model designations were never a Larson strong suit, and 'Prairie State' was never an official designation – more a nod to the nickname for the brothers' Illinois home state. That said, the relaunched Larson Bros company has made an attempt to establish some sort of structure in the product lineup. The guitars range across three series – Heritage, Vintage 1900 and New Century – and the old brand names are now used to designate specific models.

The top of the line Heritage models are all Euphonons, and there are three body styles. At present, the Vintage 1900 Series has three body styles, with Stetson designating a slope-shoulder dreadnought, Prairie State and Stahl corresponding to OM and 00 bodies. The New Century

KEY FEATURES

Larson Bros Prairie State OM Style 2 VS 1900

- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in France
- **PRICE** £2,440 (inc case)
- **BUILD** Alpine spruce top with Indian rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony bridge, bound ebony fingerboard, ebony peghead overlay, 14th fret neck join, Grover open-gear tuners, bone nut and compensated saddle
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **SCALE LENGTH** 646mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44.5mm at nut, 56.33mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.3mm at nut, 57mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.96kg/4.32lbs
- **FINISH** Hand-rubbed satin
- **CONTACT** iMusic Network +49 936 699 979 **www.larsonbros.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Only one company is now permitted to put Larson on its headstocks, but there are others making guitars based on historic Larson guitars. Check out **Nyberg Instruments** and **Greven Guitars** for their **Prairie State models** - prices will depend on specs

Grand Auditorium was never a Larson design, but is built in the Larson style.

Despite being at the more affordable end of the catalogue, this Prairie State, like all the Vintage 1900 guitars, is made according to original Larson Bros plans, with laminated bracing and is finished in nitrocellulose with a bone nut and compensated saddle. The bound headstock has an undeniably graceful shape, with an evocative pearl logo and gold-plated open-gear Gotoh tuners. The plain cream binding continues along the ebony fingerboard and around the body, where it's joined front and back by multi-layer purfling.

The ebony bridge looks just like a vintage Larson, and the satin finished mahogany necks looks to have been joined to the body post finishing - just like Martin does. The overall quality of the finish and fretwork is fairly high and although there is some untidiness inside the body, apparently the original Larsons were much the same. We also notice some glue squeeze out on the stacked heel and along the fretboard extension, but it cleans up easily enough.

IN USE

The Prairie State may bear more than a passing resemblance to a Martin OM visually, but the tone is really quite different. To our ears the Prairie State has a more robust and richer quality, especially in the lows and midrange, which support and fill out the extended treble. The upper frequencies are just about the sweetest we have heard from a brand new spruce/rosewood acoustic.

This treble response lends an undeniable refinement while also remaining vibrant, engaging and never dull. Contradictions abound, with thunderous bass that never becomes boomy, a natural compression that gels it all together without subduing transients, and an overall sense of taut control that also manages to feel supple and loose.

> The upper frequencies are the sweetest we've heard from a new spruce/rosewood acoustic

Strum any open chord towards the low end of the neck and the Prairie State responds with a grand, almost majestic quality. The bass is so rich, weighty and complex that for once, the 'piano' epithet is justified. Putting it up against a similarly spec'd Collings, the Larson isn't as nuanced or mellow, but it has more punch, volume and projection, and that could make it a bit more exciting to play depending on your taste in tone.

It's worth mentioning the Prairie State's wider neck and string spacing, because it could require some period of adjustment for fingerpickers who are more accustomed to modern acoustic designs. The neck has a fair amount of depth and the rounded profile may become a bit fatigue inducing for players with smaller hands.

Larson guitars are rare and valuable, so we offer no apologies for not having an original on hand to compare. However, we certainly spent some time listening to demos and this recreation looks and sounds a lot like the ones we have seen. The Prarie State is a guitar that demands some physical commitment from the player to unleash its considerable sonic charisma, but it's well worth the effort and the money.

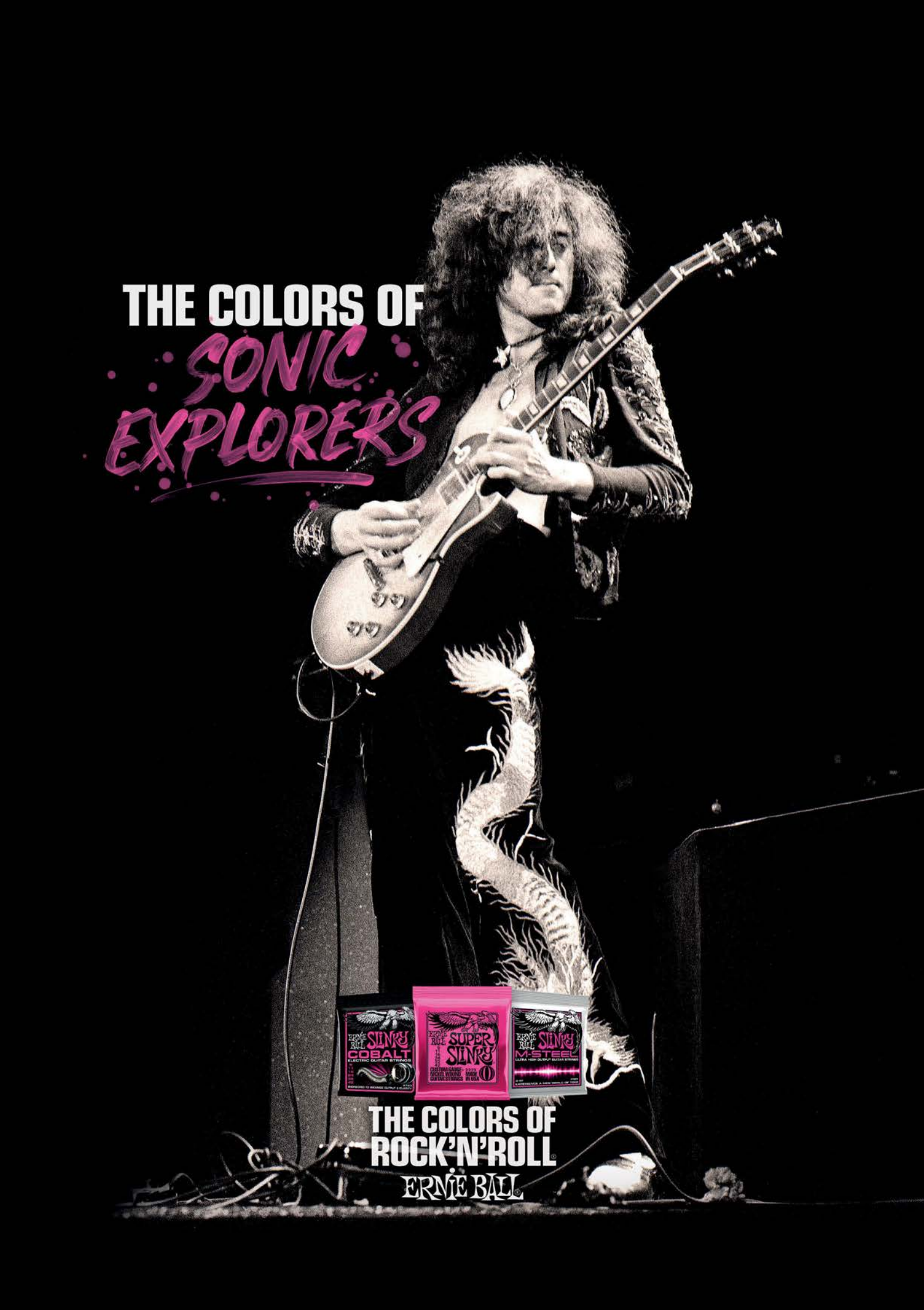
The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Larger than life tone with phenomenal bass response
+ Very present through the midrange
+ Relishes dropped tunings
+ Equally suited to strumming and picking

– Its understated looks won't be for everyone
– Neck profile is a handful
– Requires a firm touch

This is a truly inspiring instrument with authentic vintage tonality, tremendous volume, power and bass response

9/10


THE COLORS OF
SONIC EXPLORERS
ERNIE BALL SLINKY COBALT ELECTRIC GUITAR STRINGS
ERNIE BALL SUPER SLINKY NICKEL WOUND ELECTRIC GUITAR STRINGS
ERNIE BALL SLINKY M-STEEL
THE COLORS OF
ROCK'N'ROLL
ERNIE BALL

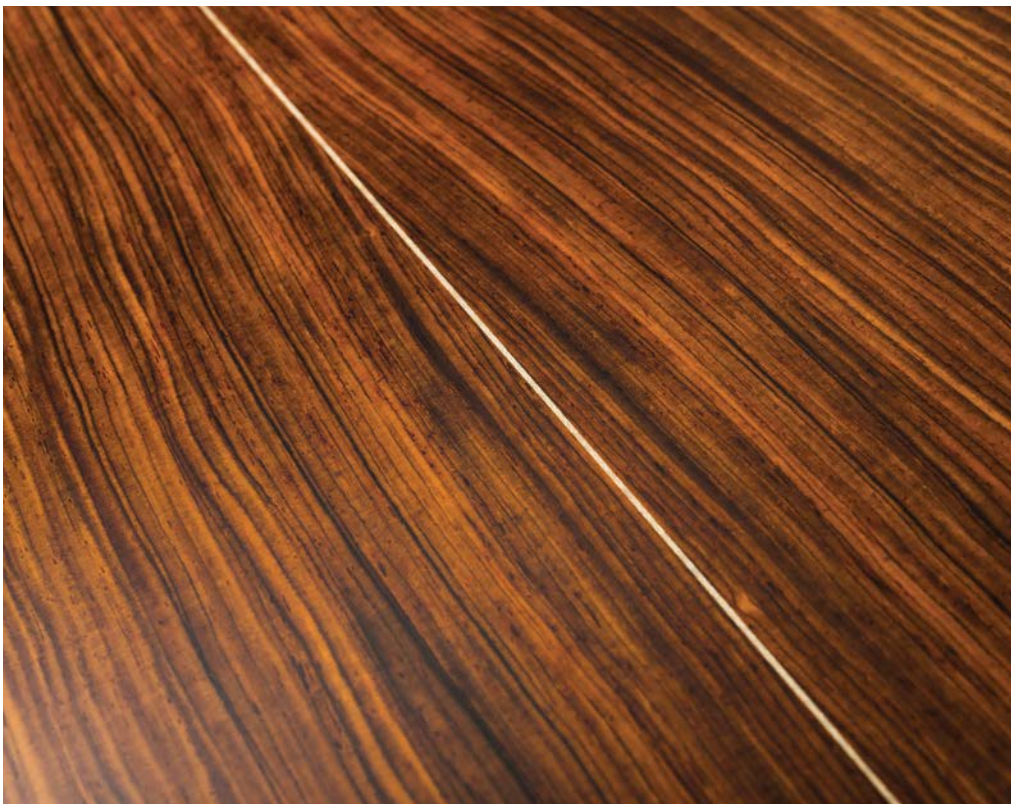
LOWDEN
S-35 12 FRET ACOUSTICS

The body size and shape may be familiar, but these are some of the very first Lowdens with a 12th fret neck join and re-designed bracing. Huw Price gets the lowdown...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

These instruments represent a departure of sorts for Northern Irish guitar institution, Lowden Guitars. They're the very first 12-fret models the company has produced and they feature a reworked bracing pattern. After falling out of favour for decades, acoustics with 12-fret body joins have made a strong comeback, but by Lowden's own admission, it's slightly late to the party. It seems customer requests reached critical mass and George Lowden decided the time had come.

The body shape itself isn't new, being identical to Lowden's S-size models. The scale length is the same, too, which is why the bridge had to be back-shifted towards the centre of the lower bout and the bracing needed to be tweaked. In essence



Lowden's long-established A-frame bracing is retained, but there are alterations in the area between the bridge plate and the tailblock.

Lowden experimented with both the angles and numbers of tone braces. A couple of designs made it through to the prototype stage and it was decided that one of the designs gave the guitar more of a traditional American voicing, while the other was far more in keeping with the Lowden sound. Understandably George and co decided to go with the latter.

These models recently took a bow at the NAMM show and there are three timber combinations to choose from. In addition to the models we're reviewing – cedar with walnut back and sides and Adirondack spruce with cocobolo back and sides – standard models include Alpine spruce with Madagascar rosewood back and sides, and a choice between Sitka or Adirondack spruce with Indian rosewood.

More tone timber combinations are available upon request, but are

subject to a custom charge. Other custom options include a cutaway, soundbox bevel, custom neck sizes, shallow neck profile and adding a factory fitted Fishman Matrix Infinity pickup system.

Let's take a closer look at each of the guitars we have here. Starting with the non-cutaway model, we have walnut back and sides characterised by vivid flamey figuring and the mellow honeyed look of cedar with almost ruler straight grain. Lighter figured maple binding creates a visual contrast that serves to define the shape.

Cocobolo grain may appear similar to rosewood, but the colour is far 'rosier'. This time the figured maple bindings are stained so they almost blend into the back and sides and the colour contrast comes from the pale and slightly creamy Adirondack spruce top.

Maple/rosewood/mahogany purflings, maple back strips and an abalone rosette with jade greens and kingfisher blues providing the decorative flourishes for both guitars. Other common features include the ebony fingerboard and peghead overlay, the top loading rosewood bridge with split bone saddle and gold plated Gotoh 510 tuners with ebony buttons.

> There's an easygoing softness and warmth to this guitar that draws you right in

IN USE

With their classic open C Lowden neck profiles, perfect setups and identical sets of 0.012 coated phosphor bronze string, both guitars feel identical to play. The body size is supremely comfortable, and with lowered string tension from the shortened scale length, electric players will feel just as comfortable as acoustic veterans. So, let's get to grips with the non-cutaway cedar/walnut model.

It might have been reasonable to anticipate a smaller sounding take on classic Lowden tone, but instead it doesn't sound small at all. However, from the first strum, there can be no doubt about the origins of this guitar.

We're talking sweetness, depth, rounded trebles, impressive projection and a natural tonal balance that lends itself equally well to strumming and fingerpicking. Without sounding in any way lacking in vibrancy or dynamics, there's an easygoing softness and warmth to this guitar that draws you right in.

While recognising the practicality of cutaways, particularly with 12-fretters, it has rarely been our aesthetic preference. However, in this case we think the spruce/rosewood body shape looks just as good and

KEY FEATURES

Lowden S-35 12 Fret CE/WA

- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in the UK
- **PRICE** £4,205 (inc case)
- **BUILD** Red cedar top with figured walnut back and sides, laminated 5-piece mahogany/rosewood neck, rosewood bridge, bound ebony fingerboard, figured maple bindings, maple/rosewood/mahogany purflings, ebony peghead overlay front & back, 12th fret neck join, Gotoh 510 tuners with ebony buttons, bone nut and split saddle
- **SCALE LENGTH** 630mm/ 24.8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.5mm at first fret, 23mm at 7th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.81lbs/1.73kg
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Hand-rubbed satin

Lowden S-35C 12 Fret CO/AD

- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic 6-string guitar with cutaway. Made in the UK
- **PRICE** £5,515 (inc case)
- **BUILD** Adirondack spruce top with cocobolo back and sides, laminated 5-piece mahogany/rosewood neck, rosewood bridge, bound ebony fingerboard, figured maple bindings, maple/rosewood/mahogany purflings, ebony peghead overlay front & back, 12th fret neck join, Gotoh 510 tuners with ebony buttons, bone nut and split saddle
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Hand rubbed satin
- **SCALE LENGTH** 630mm/24.8"
- **NECK WITH** 45mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20.5mm at first fret, 23mm at 7th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.14lbs/1.88kg
- **CONTACT** Lowden Guitars 0284 461 9161 **www.lowdenguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Other hand-built smaller-bodied options include the **Atkin AA Zebrano Custom** (£3,199) with Sitka spruce top, the **Martin Custom Shop 00 12-Fret cutaway** (£4,599) with Sitka spruce and Indian rosewood, or the mahogany back **Collings C10 Sunburst** with rope binding (£4,500)

maybe even a little better. Either way, when you're playing, the cutaway is invisible and you only become aware of it when you look down and wonder how your left hand managed to get up so high. You can leave your thumb behind the heel and still reach the top fret.

It probably comes as no surprise to learn that the spruce top sounds brighter than the cedar, but the bass is also a tad firmer and deeper. Naturally this de-emphasises the midrange and lends a shimmery harp-like sheen to the upper frequencies, along with a punchier and more percussive edge.

This faster response and enhanced clarity helps strummed parts to cut through, but it does demand a greater degree of accuracy when you're finger picking. The tone is certainly more complex and harmonics linger inside the cocobolo body much like the finest rosewood guitars. In fact, both of these models also achieve extraordinary sustain that puts them right up there with the new V-Class Taylors.

Despite the small bodies and the 12th fret neck joins, neither guitar has a 'vintage' tone and they owe little, if anything, to the American tradition. The cedar top model may be slightly more mid focused, there is no discernible boxiness and we have played dreadnoughts with less bass extension than these two.

More impressive still, they don't run out of puff when you de-tune. The cedar model is just fine down to D, but if you plan to go lower, the extra snap and tautness of the spruce/rosewood pairing helps to keep things punchier and more defined at low-C and beyond.

Lowden has achieved something quite extraordinary because these are without doubt the biggest sounding small guitars we have ever played. When reviewing a pair of similar instruments, one usually emerges as a favourite. But every time we feel we have settled on one here, we swap to the other and change our minds. If you can afford one, it's certainly a pleasant dilemma to have...

> These are without doubt the biggest sounding small guitars we have ever played

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

LOWDEN S-35 12 FRET CE/WA

+ Absolutely flawless build quality and materials
+ Very easy to play
+ Warm and supple tone
+ Deep bass
+ Loves open tunings

– Quality always costs
– May struggle when played in ultra-low tunings

Unmistakable Lowden cedar top tone in a smaller package with no discernible compromises

9/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

LOWDEN S-35C 12 FRET CO/AD

+ Absolutely flawless build quality and materials
+ Very easy to play
+ Bright, clear and complex tone
+ Even deeper bass
+ Loves dropped tunings

– Again, this kind of quality always comes with a price tag

A brighter Lowden tone with unfeasibly deep bass for the body size, that gives tremendous complexity and clarity

9/10

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BY · DENNIS · FANO

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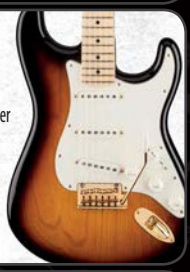

Acoustic Guitars

Our new acoustic centre in Stevenage old town is open for business. This new showroom is home to an enormous choice of exquisite acoustic instruments from Bedell, Collings, Gibson, Gretsch, Lowden, Martin, National, Taylor, Yamaha, Epiphone and many many more!!!

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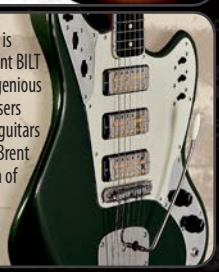

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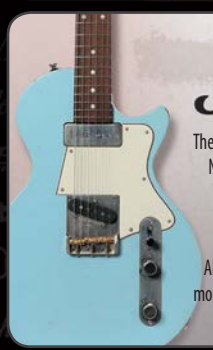

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Novo GUITARS

BY · DENNIS · FANO

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AUDEN
BOWMAN BASS

Auden's impressive range of retro-vibed, quality acoustic instruments gets a four-string addition to handle the low-end duties. Michael Heatley tunes in...

Many bassists consider an acoustic four-string a luxury rather than a necessity, even in this unplugged age. If so, then Auden's Bowman (named after head luthier Rob) is among the ultimate in luxury items. Retailing at just short of a grand and a half, it is aimed squarely at the well-heeled, if not the professional player. Yet there's no doubt it both sounds and looks as beautiful as the Julia six-string we were so taken with last year.

The AAA-grade cedar top and Indian rosewood back and sides have been treated with a thin yet resilient undercoat and gloss topcoat, while the classic combination of mahogany neck and ebony fretboard is surmounted by surprisingly generous-sized frets. Machineheads are pearl-backed and smoothly responsive; you'll need to supply your own tuner, though, as unusually there's no removable preamp 'block' in the player's eyeline. The neck is a comfortable handful – electric bassists will find the feel familiar – and the ease of playing undoubted. Truss-rod access is via the soundhole, but the action as supplied requires no adjustment. Balance on the strap is a touch neck-heavy, though many would play this kind of instrument seated.

IN USE

Unplugged, the bass is resonant and loud, especially considering its compact size. Yet acoustic basses need reinforcement in the face of six-string competition, and the Bowman has the Schertler Lydia system on its side. The EQ works with an under-saddle transducer, and the result is natural and uncoloured. Three knurled wheel controls – two volume, one tone – are discreetly mounted in the soundhole, the lithium battery nestling against the inner top bout. The Bowman is effective played through a battery-powered busking amp at a session, while blasting through a bigger rig in a rehearsal room necessitates turning both treble and bass down and using the amp controls to avoid unwanted noise.

You'll look in vain for a clue to the instrument's origin – in fact it's made in China. The guitar is described as 'bench-grade', meaning the craftsmen who hand-build the Bowman each complete a stage before passing it to another bench.

> Understated and beautifully proportioned, the Bowman may prove to be a future classic

The fit and finish is impossible to fault, and if you're raising an eyebrow at a £1,500 Chinese-built instrument, take solace in the fact that Auden installs the hardware and dresses the neck at its UK workshop.

The faux-leather case included is also a thing of beauty, and in itself it would cost you well into three figures – and who wouldn't want to protect a bass this good-looking? Whether you'd be happy subjecting it to singer-songwriter night at the Dog & Duck is another matter, but wherever we test it, the Bowman receives admiring looks. Understated and beautifully proportioned, the Bowman may yet prove a future classic.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Classy retro looks
+ Enjoyable balanced sounds
+ Comfortably-sized body still produces volume

– Some may be put off by a premium price tag on a relatively niche instrument

Not an exploratory toe into unplugged waters, but an acquisition to treasure if you can justify the investment

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Auden Bowman Bass

- **PRICE** £1,499 (w/hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Acoustic bass guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** AAA grade cedar top, with Indian rosewood back and sides. Set mahogany neck, bound ebony fretboard
- **HARDWARE** Auden chrome open-gear tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Schertler Lydia EQ pickup system
- **SCALE LENGTH** 30"/762mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at first fret, 53.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 11.5mm at nut, 17.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.2kg/4.8lbs
- **FINISH** Gloss natural
- **CONTACT** Dist X distribution **www.dist-x.com** **www.audenguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Fender Kingman** (**£470**) is probably the most common acoustic bass on the block, while at the top end, the **Takamine TB10** (**£2,195**) is a Japanese-made jumbo you can even play as a mini upright. Both are larger-bodied than the Bowman

VOLUME
DRIVE
TONE
OD1
808
TS9
MSL
TS10
XR
TS7
JHS

JHS PEDALS THE BONSAI

Can't decide which Tube Screamer or TS clone to buy? Now you can have them all, and more besides, in a single enclosure. Huw Price tests the one Tube Screamer to rule them all...

First there was the Boss OD-1 and then there was the Ibanez Tube Screamer. Then came the clones, the modifications and the reissues. Things seem to be come full circle with a widespread realisation that the originals were excellent sounding pedals all along and built in buffer amps make a lot of sense when you want silent switching and you need to push your guitar signal through a 20-foot cable.

But which Tube Screamer version is the best? For many it depends on their favourite SRV period, but the fact is, he used a bunch of different ones. Stevie probably didn't know a 4558 chip from a French fry and wouldn't have been interested in all that anyway.

Tube Screamers are all great in different ways but getting one of each would be a dauntingly expensive undertaking. This is where the Bonsai comes in because JHS has crammed eight Tube Screamer variations and an OD-1 into a single enclosure, with a nine-position switch to select the overdrive type.

Myriad options are most commonly associated with modelling technology, but the Bonsai is all-analogue. With all the extra circuitry, which JHS spent three years developing, there's no room for a battery compartment or the input and output buffers of the originals. This is a true bypass pedal, complete with the slight popping sound that accompanies switch-on.

IN USE

Let's be clear from the outset – the Bonsai isn't nine distinct overdrives in a single box. It's more like three overdrives plus six variations on a theme. The OD-1 is a rough diamond and we compare it to a DIY build OD-1 with an added tone control. Despite the authentic absence of a tone control on the Bonsai version, it's unmistakably the same circuit with symmetrical clipping diodes and a rougher but clearer sound than a regular Tube Screamer.

> JHS has crammed eight Tube Screamer variations and an OD-1 into a single enclosure

In a direct comparison with a 1981 Ibanez TS9, in TS9 mode the Bonsai sounds similar, but the accuracy falls slightly short of the Maxon reissues we looked at last year. The Ibanez has a little extra smoothness in the midrange and the Bonsai has more of a grainy upper midrange emphasis. Surprisingly (or maybe not) the Bonsai does sound almost exactly like our vintage Ibanez unit when it's in 808 mode.

Sweeping through the TS modes, each offers subtle changes in gain and frequency emphasis. MSL gives a throatier low-mid bark while TS10 lowers the gain and applies a more extreme low-end roll off that takes a bigger bite out of the low mids.

The XR mode sounds like a decent boutique clone of a Tube Screamer – the type that broadens the frequency range and opens out the slightly murky midrange for improved transparency, without losing the essence or charm of the Tube Screamer tone. Keeley mode ticks the same boxes, and while retaining even more of the original Tube Screamer tonality, it also offers improved clarity and a more percussive edge.

There are two real oddities – TS7, which produces the highest gain and a thick but well defined velvety sustain, and JHS, which is by far the loudest and cleanest mode. This may actually be our favourite because it's more about clean boost, mild overdrive and clarity enhancement. That said, it's also the mode that least resembles a TS, but it's a very useful sound to have on hand.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The Bonsai falls bang in the middle of the vintage TS9 price range, but it's about half the price of an original TS808. Reissues from the original manufacturer **Maxon** are around (**£110**). If you want versatility, the **Fulltone Full-Drive 2** (**£149**) has tone shaping switches, switchable MOSFET/diode clipping and an independent boost function

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Nine very usable sounds
+ Simple to operate
+ Compact enclosure

– Power supply only
– Relatively expensive
– Slight on/off switch noise

There may be more vintage correct and sonically accurate Tube Screamers on the market, but the Bonsai beats them all for versatility

8/10

KEY FEATURES

JHS The Bonsai

- **DESCRIPTION** Compact true bypass overdrive pedal. Made in the USA
- **PRICE** £219
- **CONTROLS** Volume, drive, tone, 9-way switch for modes based on Boss OD-1, TS808, TS9, Metal Screamer, TS10, Exar OD-1, TS-7 (+ mode), Keeley Mod Plus and JHS Strong Mod
- **POWER** 9V external PSU only
- **CONTACT** JHS Pedals info@jhspedals.com **www.jhspedals.com**

TUBE DISTINCTIONS POWER WORKS PRO TD2414PRO

Is dirty electricity ruining your tone? Maybe you need a mains filter in your life. Ed Oleszko finds out what the buzz is all about...

KEY FEATURES

Tube Distinctions Power Works Pro TD2414PRO

- **PRICE** £345
- **DESCRIPTION** Mains power filter
- **CONTROLS** None
- **FEATURES** IEC mains input. 2x separately filtered output sockets
- **DIMENSIONS** 210 x 135 x 95mm
- **CONTACT** Tube Distinctions 01443 814738 **tubedistinctions.co.uk**

In an era during which guitarists spend countless hours and pounds on a 'tone quest' hunting the latest and most authentic hand-made pickups, boutique overdrives or cables, how many of us have actually stopped to consider the negative or positive (ahem) effect of actual electricity on our tone?

Acoustic-only musicians aside, the vast majority of us will at a minimum plug in to at least one mains socket when setting up our rigs. Add a couple of switch mode pedal power supplies, a laptop/iPad/phone, PA, lights… and the noise soon adds up. This phenomenon is often referred to in the trade as 'dirty electricity' (DE) and manifests itself as high frequency electrical noise of around 1,000Hz superimposed onto your signal – not nice.

So what do we do about it? Well, a British company called Tube Distinctions claims to understand the problem, as founder Anthony Matthews notes, "Nearly every electrical device you buy has a noisy switch mode power supply that leaks noise into the electrical cables in your house, studio, or venue… even radio frequencies from mobile phone transmitters and TV transmitters can be present on the mains supply."

Tube Distinctions made its name repairing and servicing audio and valve hi-fi equipment, attracting the patronage of a certain Mr Jimmy Page along the way. Servicing led to creating power filters for the none-more-fussy hi-fi nerds, and with these having proved a roaring success, Matthews has now turned his attention to sorting out musicians.

Although much cheaper power strips often claim to filter such noise, each TD2414PRO is built to order, featuring a bespoke network of filters claimed to be especially tuned to cut the noise in musician's rigs by up to a whopping 52dB!

IN USE

Imagine the contrast between drinking plain tap water or a cup of filtered water with of all the impurities removed. This is how the TD2414PRO operates, filtering impurities and noise from the mains electricity source powering your entire rig. With max power handling of 10 amps or 2,300 watts you can easily (and we have) plug in an entire club-sized PA system with no issues.

With no controls to master you simply plug the TD2414PRO into the mains and then plug and your gear into the individually filtered sockets. LED indicators usefully display correctly configured live, neutral and earth, helping to indicate – but not eradicate, mind you – any potentially dangerous issues with the electrical supply.

We try out the TD2414PRO both in the studio and in a range of live gig situations with no issues. While it doesn't remove ground loops the TD2414PRO certainly does remove a layer of background DE noise that seems to sit on your mains signal and is thus is ever-present in your guitar tone. Amps and pedals simply sound quieter, clearer and more present.

Those of you who gig with tablets, laptops into the PA may well find the TD2414PRO markedly improves your signal to noise ratio.

> With the TD2414PRO, amps and pedals simply sound quieter, clearer and more present

Although it is undoubtedly expensive, the benefits of the TD2414PRO become most apparent when you remove it from your set-up – reintroducing a level of background DE noise in your tone that you previously didn't even realise was there. For the price of a boutique stompbox, a one-box solution to potentially improve the sound of every bit of gear you own seems pretty reasonable after all.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

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The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Cleans up noisy mains power
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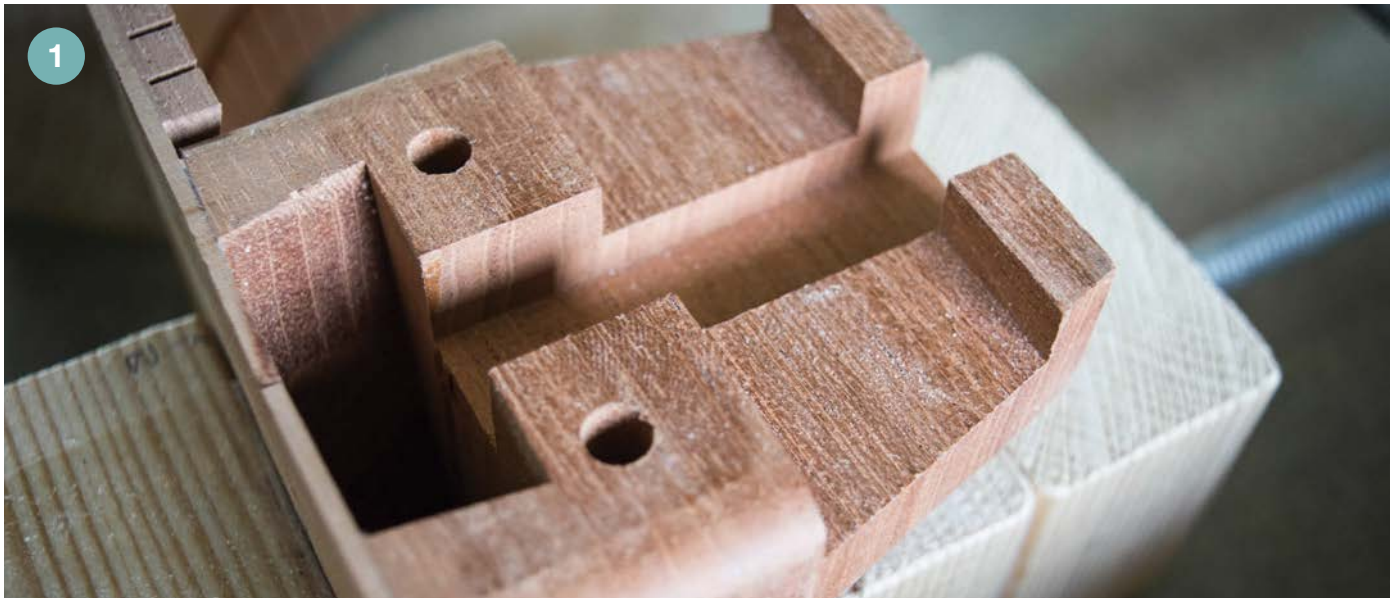
PART FOUR

DIY WORKSHOP

MARTIN GUITAR KIT

At last, the time has come to finish making the body of our acoustic guitar kit. However, things are rarely as straightforward as we hope. Huw Price gets there eventually...



1 The angled ledge protruding from the neck block is not a vintage Martin feature

2 This is how the neck block looks with the ledge sawn off

3 The rear side of the neck block must be cut down to the pencil lines to create an angled ramp

When we last left our Martin acoustic kit build, we'd taken the opportunity to customise the guitar by altering the brace positioning and shaping them to 'tune' the back and tops. This is where mere guitar kit assembly crossed over into something approaching proper building, and it demonstrates why a Martin kit may get you closer to your ideal instrument than anything you could buy off the rack for an equivalent price. This time around we're putting the body together.

CHOPPING BLOCKS

Before gluing the front and back onto the sides, adjustments must be made to the neck block. The first isn't strictly necessary, but I'm choosing to remove the protruding ledge because vintage models didn't have them.

I also feel that truss rod access will be easier, but I can't deny that my calculations were a bit off and the popsicle brace is in slightly the wrong place. There's nothing too technical about removing the ledge, and I merely saw it off then tidy things up with a sanding block.

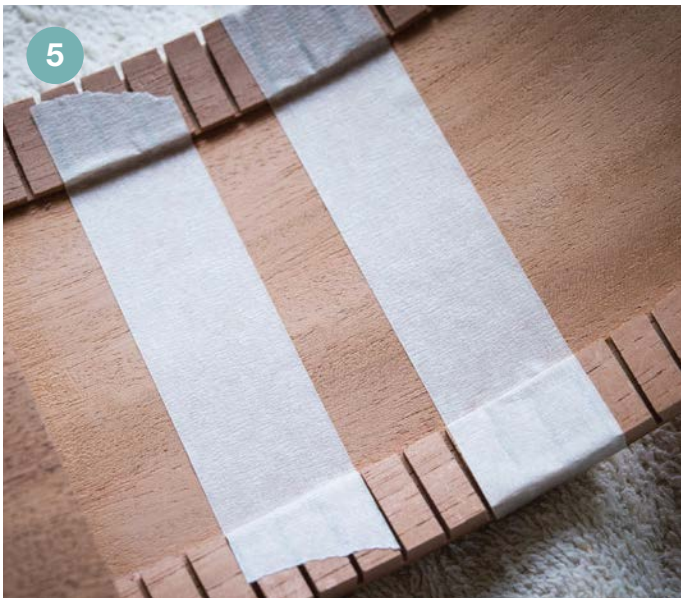
As supplied the neck block is taller than the sides in the neck join area. The sides are glued to the block with the top of the block and the side edges carefully aligned, but where the back is to be glued on, the neck block protrudes about 1cm beyond the side edge.

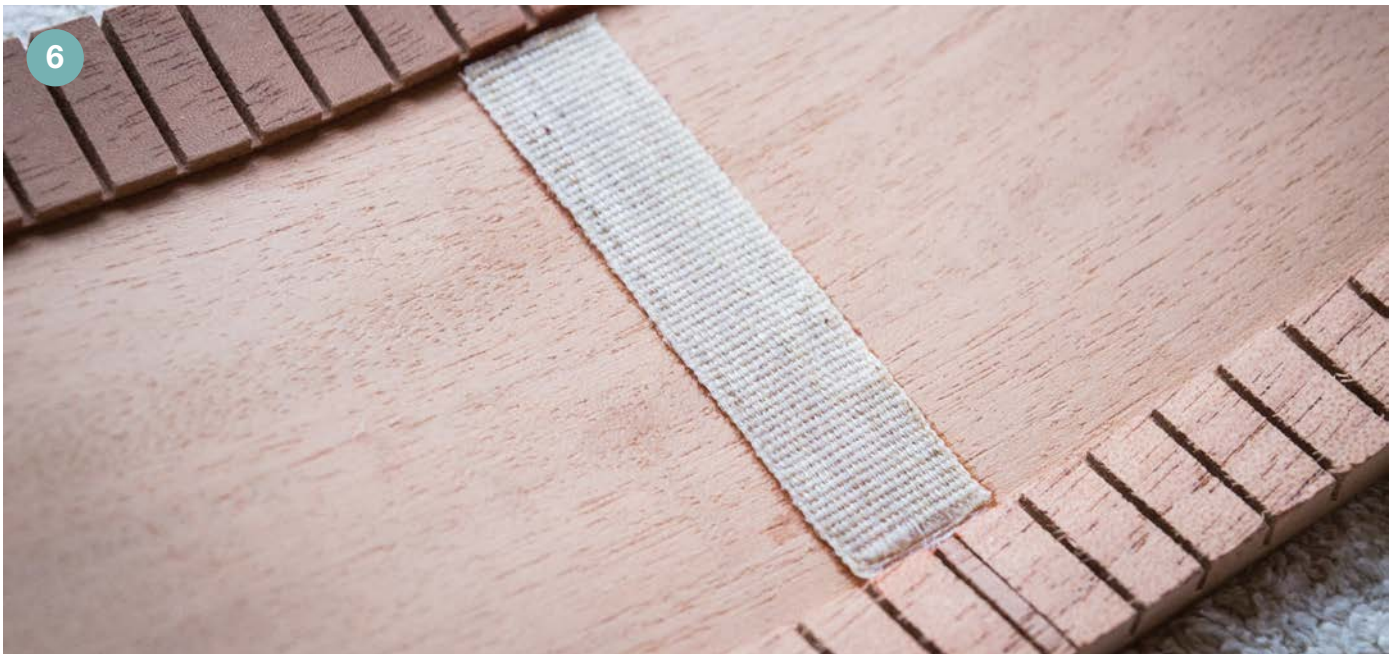
Clearly the excess has to be trimmed off, but it's a mistake to cut the block square to the sides. Remember that from the waist onwards, the sides slope down to bring body depth to a minimum across the top of the upper bout.

If you cut the block square and then glue the back on, you'll end up with a 'dimple' in the back where it flattens out over the block. To avoid this, you must cut the neck block at an angle that matches the slope of the sides.

I place a steel ruler across the internal surface of the block, drop it down to touch the sides at both ends and draw a line straight across. This gives me a line for the top of the slope and I draw lines onto the sides of the block to connect the top line to the top of the rims.

Rather than use a saw, I remove the majority of the unwanted wood using a small block plane and follow up with a rasp. Both remove wood





quickly and I work carefully to take the block down to the pencil lines. With just a fraction of a millimetre left to go, I finish the job with my sanding block, which ensures a flat surface largely devoid of file marks.

PATCHING UP

One more task must be completed before the body is glued together. Look inside most all solid-wood acoustic guitars and you'll see small wooden braces glued to the inside surfaces of the rims. Although they no doubt add a bit of stiffness and structural strength, the real purpose for these kerfing-to-kerfing struts is to protect against side splits.

In the event that a guitar does receive a whack, or the wood experiences excessive temperature or humidity changes, side splits along the grain line may result. These cracks should stop when they reach one of these side braces, and be prevented from spreading too far.

During the vintage era, it was more common to glue strips of fabric onto the sides to achieve the same result. Although side struts are provided with the kit, I figure that if I'm going vintage style on the top bracing, I might as well address the sides in the same spirit.

I find some pure cotton ribbon at a fabric shop and although it's not black in colour like the vintage stuff, I quite like the look. Realising things could get messy, I decide to fix masking tape on the sides, leaving a ribbon width gap between pairs as I decide where the patches will be.

The hide glue pot goes back on the heat, and while it's coming up to temperature, I cut all my ribbon strips to the correct lengths. When the glue reaches 60°C, it acquires a water-like viscosity. A length of ribbon is dropped into the glue, where it absorbs the glue and is removed using a tweezers.

I quickly place it onto the correct spot on the side, press it down and dab off any excess glue. The masking tape is then removed, leaving clean wood either side of the patch. The process is repeated until all the patches are done and after the glue has set overnight, the sides are placed back into the mould with the back facing upwards.

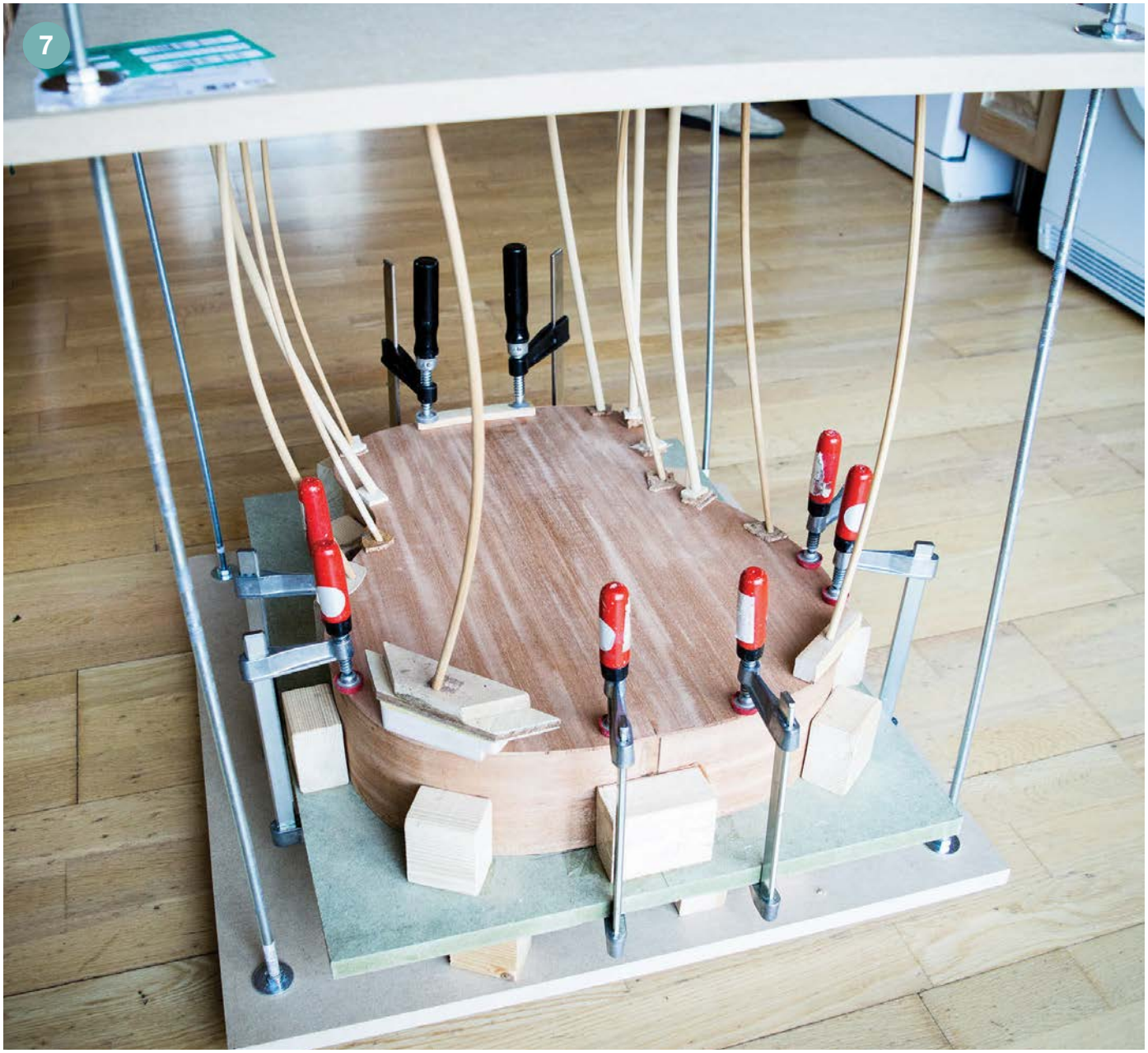
ALL ON DECK

This is where things begin to get really exciting, because I will finally see the body coming together and

4 With the neck block cut, filed and sanded, the back can be glued on

5 Masking tape protects the wood and the fabric patches are glued into the gap

6 The glue has dried and thanks to the masking tape strips, very little cleaning up is required



7 Using a combination of G-clamps and go-bars in our hastily constructed deck, the back is glued onto the sides

looking like a proper guitar. It's time to glue the back onto the rims, but I need to figure out how to clamp it. The block mould I made has been holding everything square since the start of the project, but since it's built on a rectangular slab of board, the jaws of my G-clamps are too shallow to reach the edges.

I consider two options - securing hook bolts onto the blocks and attempting to use bolts and wide diameter washers as improvised clamps, or building a proper go-bar deck. Eventually I decide on the latter, and building one is quick, easy and fun.

A trip to B&Q produces two pieces of 18mm plywood cut from a single piece of 4x2. Save yourself a load of work and get them to cut it. I also buy four one-metre lengths of M8 threaded steel rod, 16 nuts, 16 3cm diameter washers and four nylon nut covers. Total cost is a shade under £30.

Back home, I align the boards, clamp them together and drill a 10mm hole in each corner. A nut and washer go onto the end of each threaded rod and are set about 2.5cm from the end. The rods then go through the holes in one of the boards and with about 1cm of rod protruding, a second washer and nut go onto each rod and they all get tightened up. With a nylon cover slipped over each of the outer nuts, the base of the go-bar deck is now complete.

The base is placed on a flat surface and the nut and washer process is repeated to secure the top of the go-bar deck. I place the guitar mould onto the base and set the gap between the go-bar deck's top and what will be the upper surface of the guitar's back about 1cm shorter than my lengths of dowel. The structure is a little wobbly, but I know it will stabilise once a few go-bars have been positioned.

Because I tend to prefer acoustics that have lively backs, I decide to cut the braces just short of the sides rather than tuck them into the kerfing. Slight adjustments are made to the length of the back graft at the tail block to ensure a snug fit and I have a dry run at clamping the back using a combination of G-clamps where they reach and go-bars where they don't.

With all my G-clamps, dowel go-bars, blocks and spacers ready and organised, I apply Titebond Original

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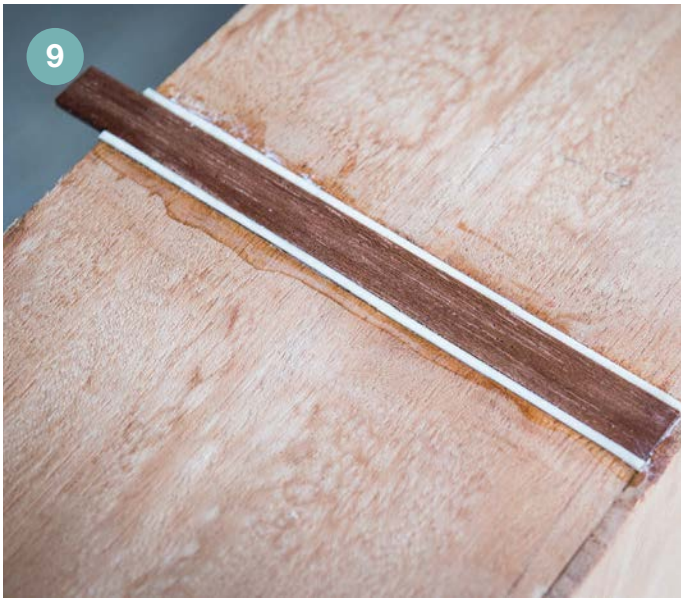

8 After some chiselling and sanding, the rear plates are flush with the sides

9 The tail block inlays are set into the gap with superglue and epoxy

10 A sanding block is used to tidy up the tail block inlays

glue to the relevant places. So far, the whole project has been done with hide glue, but the since the glue has to be applied over a very wide area, and the open time is so short, I opt to play it safe.

Along the kerfing, I try to strike a balance between enough and too much by squeezing out a thin and fairly even line. To distribute the glue, I dab it lightly with my finger rather than wipe and spread. The object is to keep the glue on top of the kerfing and not to press it into the gaps.

With glue also applied to the neck and tail blocks, I position the back and use G-clamps to press the back onto the blocks. Care must be taken because the back actually bends to conform to the taper of the sides. Ensuring the centre join lines up with centre marks I have pencilled onto the blocks, the mould is placed on the base of the go-bar deck. The go-bars press the back tight against the kerfing and I set it aside overnight to dry.

SQUARING OFF

With the clamps and go-bars removed, I spend some time tapping the back to gauge how well it rings. Suitably encouraged, I decide to trim the edges while the assembly remains in the mould. Martin's back plates are cut oversized so there is a fair amount of wood to be removed in some areas. In others, there's fairly little overhang.

No doubt the quickest way to trim the edges would be to use a flush cutting bit in a router table. However, I genuinely enjoy carving wood, so my favourite new chisel gets a light honing and I set to it. Pretty soon I discover the best method is to take off a little at a time. When cutting across the grain, make the first cut at an angle to remove the corner then turn the chisel blade upright to shave the edge square.

When cutting with the grain, make shallow passes because it's all too easy to cut too deep. Rather than try to remove all the wood with the chisel, and risk cutting into the sides, I leave it a millimetre or so proud around the edge and then bring it flush and square using a sanding block.

This whole process takes me just over an hour. Power tools would be quicker, and they're indispensable on a production line. However, there are no time constraints when you're building a guitar for fun, and I relish the hands-on approach.

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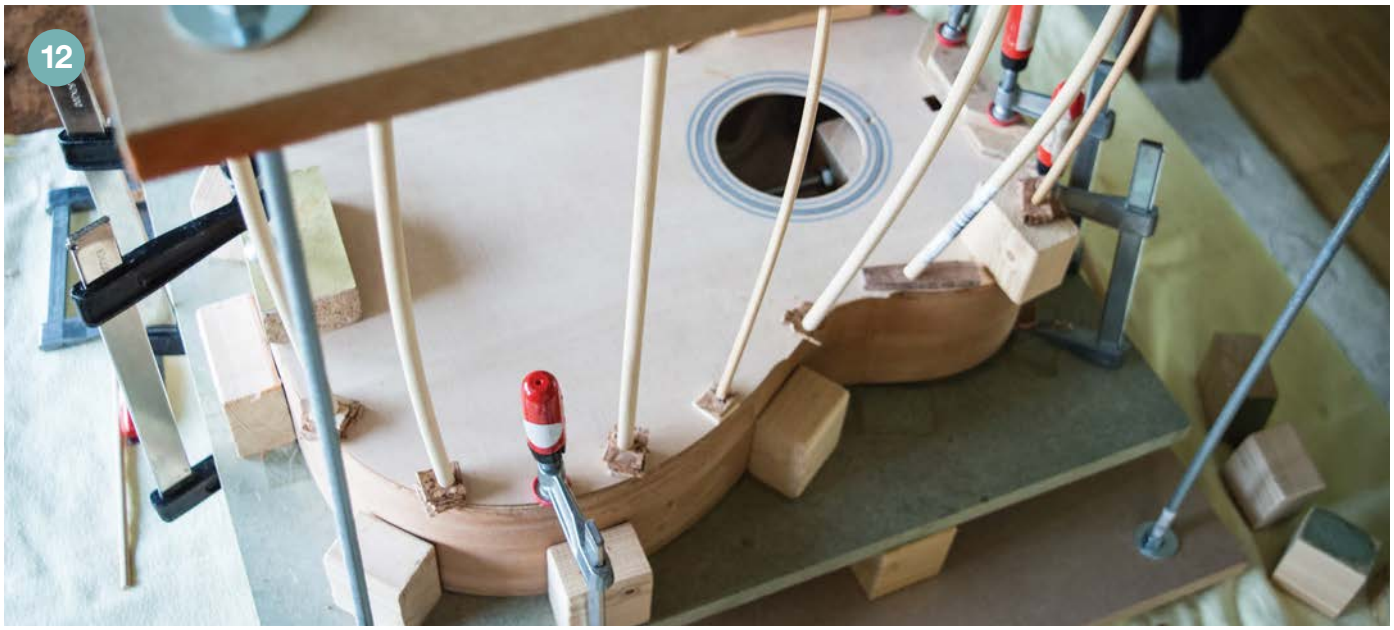

11 A towel is placed over the finely carved back braces to provide protection before the top is glued on

12 Gluing the top follows the same procedure as gluing the back and the body is left in the go-bar deck overnight

13 With the top edges tidied up, a set square confirms the mould and internal spacers have done their job

The half-finished body needs some persuasion to slide free from the mould, and it feels far more rigid and stable with the back attached. There is relatively little glue squeeze out, and what there is flakes off easily with a chisel blade in a craft knife. I'm feeling proud of myself, until I realise that I forgot to do the inlay on the tail block...

INLAY OVERVIEW

In my defence, I would point out that this is the first acoustic I have built in years and this Martin kit is different to all the others. Previously the sides had to be trimmed to fit into the mould and the four ends butted up against each other along the neck and tail blocks.

The sides of this kit are cut short, which means they butt together at the neck block, but there's a half-inch gap at the heel block. This is pretty crucial because the router bit used to cut the binding channel has a guide bearing that follows the surface of the sides.

With no inlay filling the gap, the router bearing will drop into it and the binding channel will be uneven. With the sides butted together, this has never been an issue and I have always cut out the recess for the heel inlay after cutting the binding channel. With this kit, it would have been easiest to do the inlay before gluing the back on, but either way I now have to do it before I set about gluing the top.

The kit includes a piece of tapered black plastic for the tail inlay, with two lengths of black/white purfling. Instead I choose to retain the parallel sides and use a strip of mahogany, also supplied with the kit, edged with cream binding to match the ivoroid that I'll be using to bind the guitar.

After cleaning off any glue, and squeezing out and truing the edges with a chisel, the binding strips go in next, secured with superglue. The mahogany strip is trimmed to fit and glued in with epoxy. When the glue is dry, I trim the excess with a saw and tidy everything up with a sanding block.

CLOSING THE BOX

Gluing the top on is much the same as gluing the back, but there are some differences. The ends of the X braces and the lateral brace need to be tucked into the kerfing, so the exact positions are marked, notches are cut into the kerfing and the X braces are trimmed so they'll sit just inside the rims. As I'm making

the kerfing notches, I remove small quantities of wood until the top drops in snugly.

A few of the blocks are removed before the body will go back in the mould facing upwards, and I place a towel under the body spacers to protect the back braces and apply Titebond glue as before. The tapered sides allow the tail block to touch the backing board while the neck area is raised about 15mm off the surface. That's sufficient clearance to get four G-clamps around the neck area with another at the heel block. The mould is transferred to the go-bar deck, clamped up and left overnight to dry.

Although there was plenty of overhang with the back plates, the top is cut almost exactly to size and there is absolutely zero margin for error. In fact it's too small in some areas and I take great care to ensure that where it does stop short of the sides, the gap is less than the width of the binding I plan to use.

After having to knock off a couple more mould blocks, I breathe a sigh of relief when the body eases out in one piece. The neck block and top have remained square and the tap tones are encouraging. With the body complete, attention now shifts to body binding and making the neck.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw takes a break from the Martin kit build and restores a bargain-priced 1951 Fender TV Front Pro to its former glory

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ALL ABOUT... FREDDIE TAVARES

Musician, inventor, and a huge figure in Fender's history. Huw Price celebrates the life and times of Leo's greatest sideman...

Even if you've never heard of Freddie Tavares, you've almost certainly heard him. That was Freddie playing the iconic pedal-steel glissando at the start of the *Looney Tunes* theme tune in 1942, and he can also be heard strumming the ukulele on Elvis Presley's *Blue Hawaii*. But there was much more to him than that.

Freddie Tavares was a Hawaiian designer, engineer and multi-instrumentalist who also played for Bing Crosby, Dean Martin, The Andrews Sisters, Henry Mancini and Lawrence Welk among countless others. What's more, he was also a key figure behind the scenes at Fender across four decades.

MAN OF STEEL

Frederick Theodore Tavares was born on Maui Island, Hawaii, 18 February 1913. He began singing early on and when he was 12, Freddie's eldest brother gave him a guitar. He clearly had natural ability because three years later he landed the rhythm guitar chair in Mary Kunewa's orchestra. Having finished school, Freddie moved to Oahu, playing guitar three nights per week in Larry Bellis' dance orchestra at the Alexander Young hotel. Soon after, Harry Owens offered Freddie the chance to play electric steel with the dance orchestra of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, Waikiki.

At the time, Freddie couldn't actually play the instrument that he would become most closely associated with, but Freddie told Owens, "I could easily learn to play one". Armed with the arrangements, it took Freddie less than two weeks to learn all the steel guitar parts.

Freddie stayed with The Royal Hawaiians for 13 years, playing prestigious venues all over America and recording for Decca, Columbia and Capitol Records. He was clearly keen on electric instruments from the beginning, starting with a Rickenbacker 'frying pan' and graduating to a six-string black and white Bakelite Rickenbacker steel as soon as the model was released in July 1935. Freddie's was the third one made and he played through amplifiers that he built himself.

Having grown tired of life as an itinerant musician, Freddie relocated his family to Anaheim, California in 1942. Seeking session work, Freddie's excellent sight reading ability and professionalism soon made him an in-demand player amongst movie score arrangers and record producers. Freddie also did a lot of radio and TV work.

In 1949 Freddie joined Wade Ray and his Ozark Mountain Boys on steel guitar, and began playing regularly at a club in Los Angeles called Cowtown. Over the next few years Freddie would write all the group's arrangements, build their amplifiers and even figure out a way to amplify Ray's violin. This facility with electronics led to a meeting with Leo Fender.

Freddie's first real project at Fender was to put the Stratocaster on the drawing board

THE FATEFUL MEETING

By 1953 the Fender factory was running at full capacity and Leo Fender was getting a bit burned out. He needed an assistant, preferably a professional musician, who could provide technical feedback from a player's perspective. In March 1953, a mutual friend called Noel Boggs introduced the two men at Cowtown.

Freddie clearly wasn't a fan of Fender amps and after the show he spent some time telling Leo what he thought was wrong with them. Rather than take offence, Leo took a screwdriver out of his infamous leather pocket pouch and opened up Freddie's home-built amp on stage to check out how he had put it together. Leo was sufficiently impressed to offer Freddie a job as his assistant engineer.

Although Freddie was hired for his electronics expertise, at that time the Fender company was primarily focused on designing a new guitar to accompany the Telecaster. On Freddie's second day at Fender he began his "first real project... to put the Stratocaster on the drawing board".

Working with Leo, Bill Carson and guitarist Rex Gallion, Freddie helped to refine and finalise the shape and contours of the Stratocaster body. However, it is widely accepted that Freddie's most significant contribution to the Strat was his involvement with the design of the vibrato system.

Leo's first design attempt was much closer to the vibrato that ended up on the Jazzmaster

and Jaguar. Although it functioned pretty well, its roller bridge saddles reduced sustain and it had the tonal qualities of a banjo. Having already spent six months on development and $5,000 on tooling, this must have been a bitter pill for Leo, but the forthright Freddie talked him around.

Freddie realised that the bridge needed more mass, and he also advocated an integrated design based on a mechanical gram scale rather than one with a separate bridge. Freddie's redesign was so effective, it has remained a feature of Stratocasters ever since, and the basic design principle was adopted for all the locking trems that came after.

For Freddie, it was a flying start and he went on to play a significant part in the development of the Jazzmaster, Jaguar, Jazz Bass and Bass VI. Despite Leo reverting to his original vibrato design for the Jazzmaster, it seems that model was the design Freddie liked best because he retained one from the first batch of three prototypes as his personal guitar.

BACK TO AMPS

Freddie was also heavily involved in amplifier design while at Fender, and was pivotal in the development of the 4x10 Bassman – arguably the most iconic and influential of all Fender amplifiers. Having helped to create the quintessential American rock amp, it's ironic that Freddie disapproved of overdrive. In fact, it's probably what bugged him most about TV front tweeds back in 1953.

His son, Terry Tavares, recalls Freddie complaining, "I've put my integrity and heart into the design of Fender amps, and they produce crystal-clear sound. These snot-nosed three-chord wonders now want them to sound like $39.95 Sears catalogue amps. One of these days I'm going to design a 10,000-watt amp and not tell them. When they turn the volume up to max and play their first chord, poof, they'll just disappear."

Freddie said that "all of the guitars were essentially Leo's design", and this natural self-effacement tallies with Dan Smith's recollection of Freddie as "the most humble man I have ever known". It's probably fair to say he didn't always get the credit or recognition he deserved, but Smith also described him as "outgoing by nature, funny and entertaining, articulate to a fault, continually in search of knowledge and unbelievably caring."

Others who worked closely with Freddie certainly did recognise his contribution to Fender's history. John Page, who once headed up Fender's Custom Shop, got his big break when Freddie recruited him as a design assistant in 1978.

"What a freakin' honour, 23 years old and I was made a guitar designer at Fender working side-by-side with Freddie Tavares. Freddie became like a father to me. He even called me his third son. He taught me the ins and outs of guitar design, told lots of historical stories, made me take vitamins, and told lots and lots of really bad, old jokes. He would even do one-arm pushups when artists stopped by just to show them how spry he was. I loved him. What a great man".

"He would even do one-arm pushups when artists stopped by just to show them how spry he was…"

Guitarist and Fender executive Bill Carson, who was one of Leo Fender's trusted consultants, said it all: "In my opinion, he was the greatest man in both musical talent and personal integrity that I ever worked with". Even so, by the early 1980s, the management had stopped listening to Freddie, and some within the company regarded him as little more than a symbolic figurehead.

LIFE AFTER FENDER

Freddie stayed musically active throughout his career, keeping up the session work, recording movie soundtracks and playing with his brother Eddie in The South Sea Islanders. He was also a founder and long serving treasurer of the Polynesian Society in California.

Following his retirement in 1985 Freddie stepped up his gigging schedule, playing mostly for older people in nursing and retirement homes. It's doubtful that any of them would have known that their entertainment was being provided by an inductee of the Fender Hall of Fame and the Steel Guitar Hall of Fame.

Referring to his mixed lineage, Freddie would proudly remark that, "the Portuguese makes me stubborn; Chinese makes me smart; English makes me high-class; Hawaiian gives me the music; Tahitian gives me the beat - I couldn't ask for more." Freddie died in Anaheim, California on 24 July 1990 at the age of 77 and he is buried in Nuuanu cemetery on Oahu.

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CHORD CLINIC

After last month's look at added chords, we stop adding things and try out the 11th chord instead. Rod Fogg does the sums...

To make an add11 chord, you take a triad and simply add the 11th note up from the root. So, for example, Cadd11 would be CEG plus F. Making an 11th chord is a little more complicated. In theory you start with the triad and then include the seventh, the ninth and of course, the 11th. This is not feasible on the guitar and even if it was, we would normally leave out the third because it clashes unpleasantly with the 11th. We also tend to leave out the fifth because most chords have a fifth and it contributes nothing but padding. That leaves C11 as C, B♭, D and F – which is to say, root, seventh, ninth and 11th.

Figure 1 begins with C11, and with just a slide of your first finger this chord becomes C9. We then do the same trick two frets up the guitar; at this point you should repeat the C11 to C9 and then move on to F6 and D7, making a repeatable eight bar sequence. Be careful to mute the unwanted notes and you can strum in a suitable Latin or funky rhythm; you could also try fingerstyle like a 1960s bossa nova. Imagine you are João Gilberto and Astrud is about to sing.

Getting in early with this month theory conundrum we find that C11 is part of the family of dominant chords, chord V, which includes C7, C9, C13 and so on. However, the tension in this chord comes from the fact that it also contains elements of chord II, which in this key would be G minor seven. Figure 2 illustrates this with a stretched out Gm7 followed by C11. Notice that the top three notes of both chords are identical. This is why C11 sound so good followed by C9, because it suggests chord II followed by chord V, which is a common and useful progression many styles of music.

It makes sense to be able to play 11th chords in more than one voicing so for figure 3 we have shifted the shape over one string for F11 followed by F9. This time we head straight to chord I, which is B♭ in this key. B♭ major

Figure 1

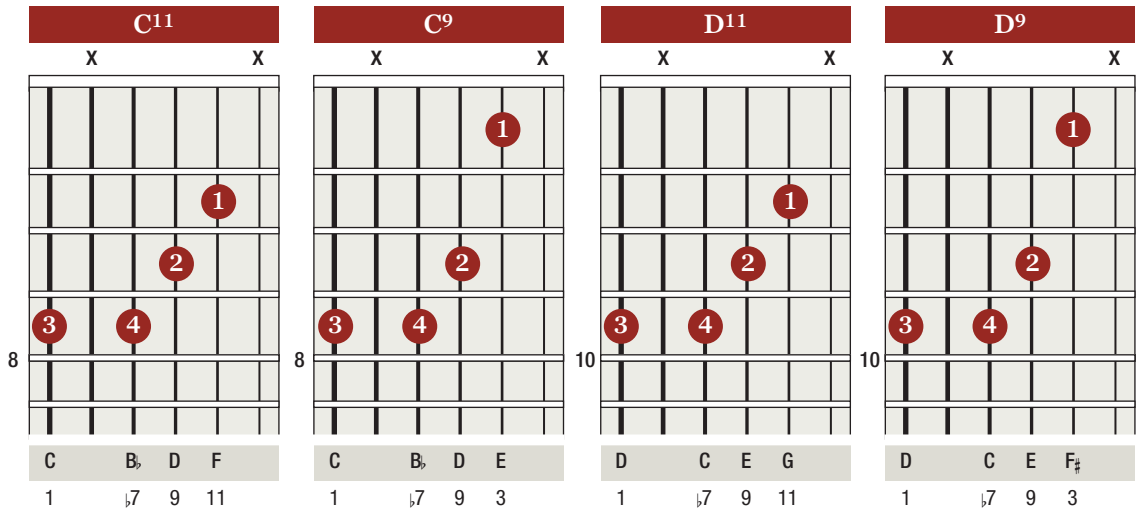


Figure 1 (cont)

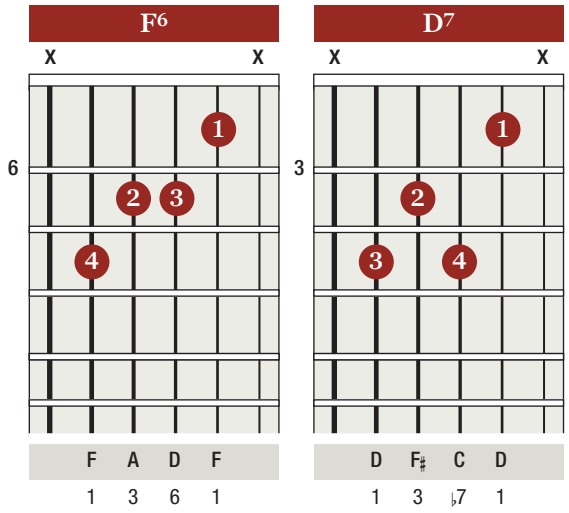


Figure 2

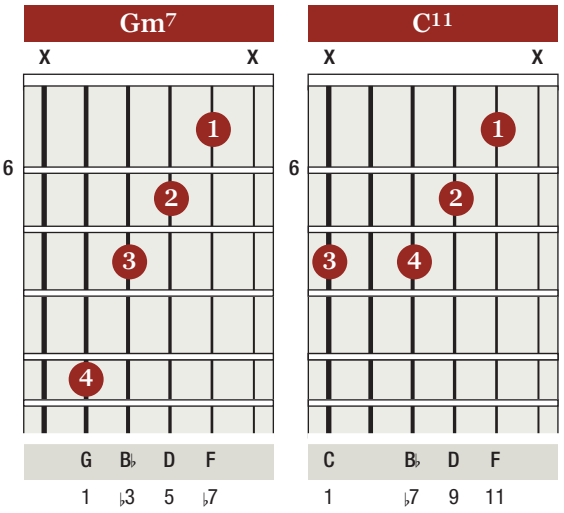


Figure 3

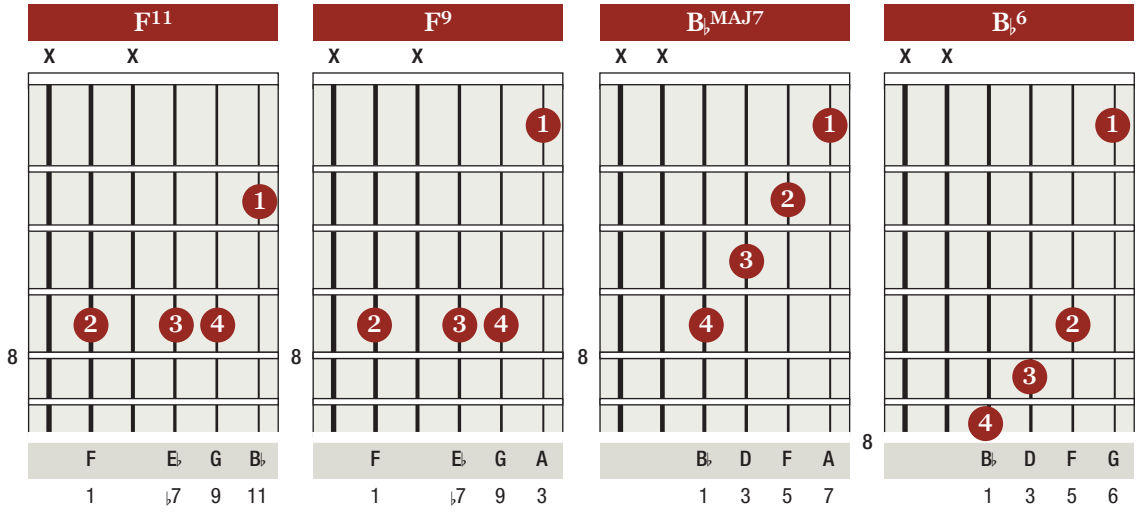
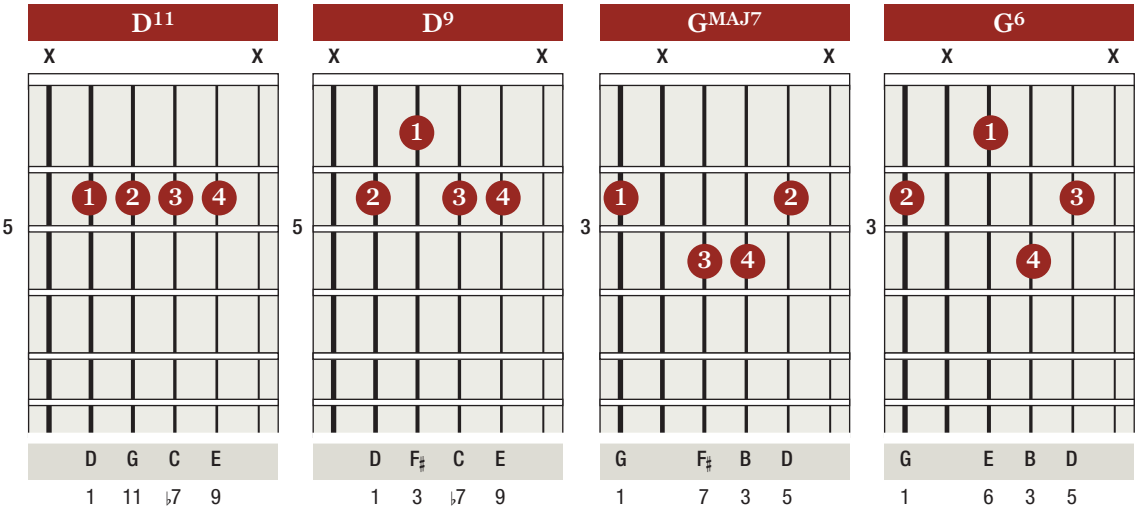


Figure 4



seven sounds cool but the stretchy B♭ sixth is cooler still. The idea is to give each chord one bar of a four bar chord sequence and loop it around; grab your pick and try it with some light funky strumming.

Cracking on to figure 4, we find an unlikely 11th chord by lining up four fingers on the middle four strings; we follow this with the same chord sequence as figure 3, but this time in the key of G and using lower voicings. Try going back to fingerstyle for these lower pitched chords. Let's go for one more bit of theory – D11 is the same as C/D. C11 is the same as B♭/C. Sometimes 11th chords are notated in this way, as 'slash' chords. Take a look at the notes involved and it should make sense, and don't be scared, just play an 11th chord.

11th chords can often sound like 7sus4 chords. Compare C7sus4 moving to C7 from figure 5 to the first two chords in figure 1 – both sound good, but the figure 1 chords sound a little richer. It's the presence of the

ninth that makes the difference. We've been using 11th chords in sequence with other chords when in fact there is no need for 11th chords to progress to the ninth, seventh or anything else; take a listen to Randy Crawford's *Street Life* and you'll hear it begin with a rising sequence of 11th chords – the first one is C11 if you want to try figuring the rest out.

Moving back in the direction of funky four-string heaven Figure 6 introduces G11 on the top four strings of the guitar. As before we have followed it around a four-bar chord sequence, this time ending on a slightly easier version of the sixth chord than the one in figure 3. Try putting the figure 3 chord in instead – you will need to move it two frets up the guitar, which should make it easier because the frets will be closer together. One thing to notice about all the chords in this month's Chord Clinic is that they are all movable shapes, so feel free to slide them around and change key as much as you like. Have fun working 11th chords into your playing and we'll be back next month.

Figure 5

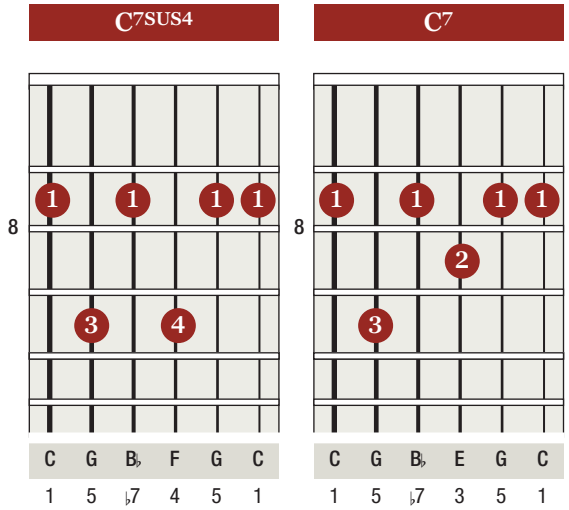
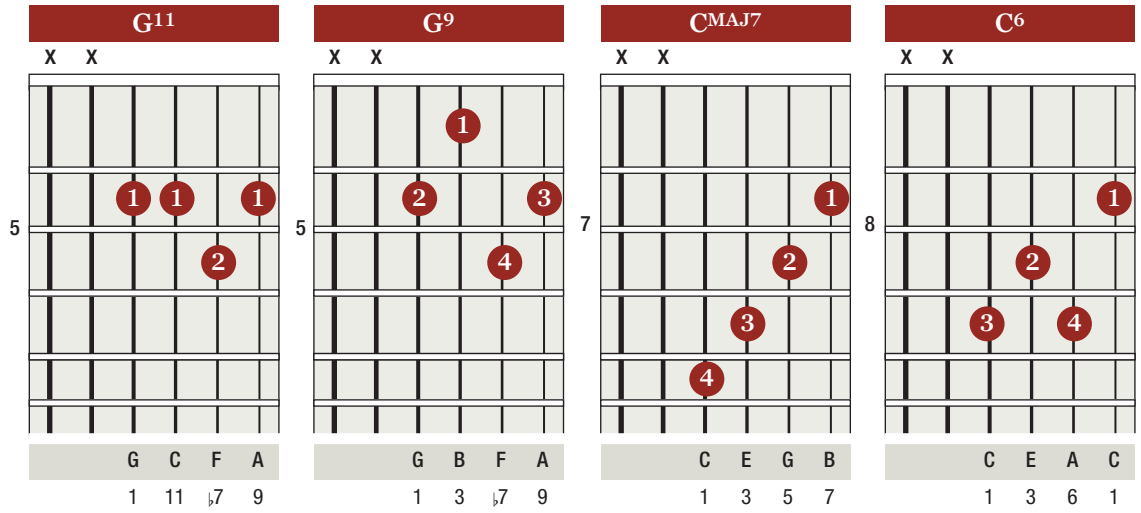


Figure 6



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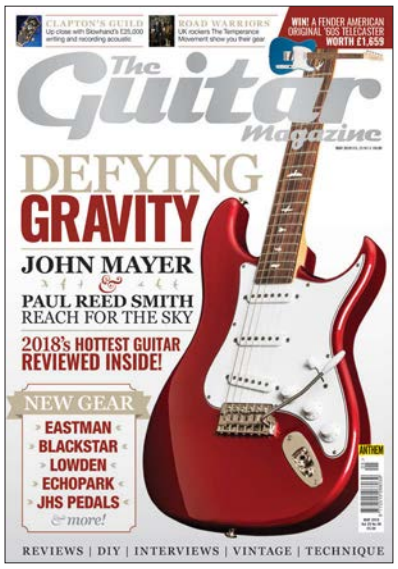

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DANNY BRYANT

The UK blues guitarist on droolsome Strats, unreliable trousers, and why you always have to have it over ice...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"That's a really hard decision to make! I believe that you form more of a bond with the instruments that you rely on when it's time to hit the stage. For that reason I'd have to go with a Fender Custom Shop 1961 Stratocaster that I have had for the past 14 years. That guitar has been with me at every show that I've played since I first bought it."

2 In another life I'd have been...
"It's really hard to imagine my life any other way because I turned pro when I was 18 years old. I'd have liked to have been an actor – that's not to say I'd have had any success, I just did it at school for fun. I'm not really built for sports! I'd never have a guitar shop – I'd never sell anything, just keep them all for myself!"

3 The moment it all started...
"There was always a lot of guitar-driven music in my house when I was growing up. My dad played acoustic blues guitar at home and both my parents listened to lots of Hendrix, Clapton, and Rory Gallagher. The first time I really had a light bulb moment was watching some video footage of Rory Gallagher playing *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Then later I went to see Walter Trout play live and made the decision, that's what I want to do."

4 The one that got away...
"Yeah. I have had quite a few Custom Shop Strats over the years and have sometimes ended selling in order to get something new. I had a really nice Masterbuilt Strat that I still regret selling. But I bought a beautiful Firebird while I was on tour in the USA with the money, so every cloud..."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"My drummer fell through the stage at a festival in Belgium. I once split my jeans wide open during the first number at a club show in Holland. We played in China a few years ago and just as we were about to go on for the first date of the tour I was giving the band a lecture about how we should be careful what we eat and drink so as not to get ill. Almost the moment I finished giving the advice I went all hot and cold and puked over myself! We still made it through the gig though, after I changed clothes!"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Playing blues music it was always instilled into me that playing with feeling is by far the most important aspect to it all, beyond technique and everything. It's kind of a cliché but of course in this particular genre it really is the most vital aspect of all."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"Usually I just noodle. When I am at home I still practice and play the same way as I did when I was a kid, I put on an album and play along in the hope of stealing a lick or two here and there. When I'm on the road I pick up the guitar about 30 minutes before we go on stage, just so I'm already a little warmed up when we start."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"The one thing I really find it hard to do without is ice. I have ice with everything. A lot of people would say it's not the best thing for your voice but it helps me and is a bit of a security blanket!"

9 My guilty pleasure...
"I really think Adele is a great artist. She has a fantastic voice, and writes great songs. Although I am not at all cool so I don't really feel any guilt or embarrassment about it!"

10 If I could just play one thing...
"When I was growing up I used to watch a video of Steve Vai playing *For The Love Of God* over and over again! I still think it is a beautiful piece of music. I still strive constantly to find that truly unique voice on the guitar like Albert or BB King, because as a player I think that's the ultimate achievement."

Danny Bryant's new album *Revelation* is out on 20 April on Jazzhaus Records

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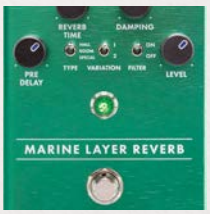

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LEVEL & ATTACK
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THE BIRTH OF FUZZ

The Tone Bender is one of the most influential pedals in the history of guitar music. In this exclusive extract from *Level & Attack: The Untold Story Of The Tone Bender Fuzz*, Simon Keeping charts the birth of this hugely important piece of guitar history...

It's January 1965. As US teenagers send Surrey songstress Petula Clark to number one with the Terry Hatch-penned *Downtown*, a small shop in Denmark Street, London's Tin Pan Alley (where the song was coincidentally composed) was about to become part of the 'British Invasion' in quite an unexpected way.

For many, music would never sound the same again. The legend has grown over the years and the names change, depending on whose version of the story you are listening to. But the facts remain. The sound musicians had been looking for was created in that tiny music shop, Macari's Musical Exchange, and in five short years, their Tone Bender fuzz box was taken from the shop shelves to centre stage at Madison Square Gardens where the biggest rock 'n' roll band on the planet, Led Zeppelin, were playing a sold out show.

The Tonebender was born in 1965, the brainchild of Gary Hurst, who had worked alongside Dick Denney at Vox. Denny had been experimenting with fuzz a few years earlier.

On the face of it, this was a simple device which utilised fairly rudimentary electronics – a wooden box, containing transistors and a footswitch to turn it on, that would allow guitarists to achieve a distorted tone at lower volumes.

Up until this point, hip young things trying to emulate their favourite Chicago blues tracks had to turn up their amplifiers all the way to achieve that all-important break-up of sound.

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONS

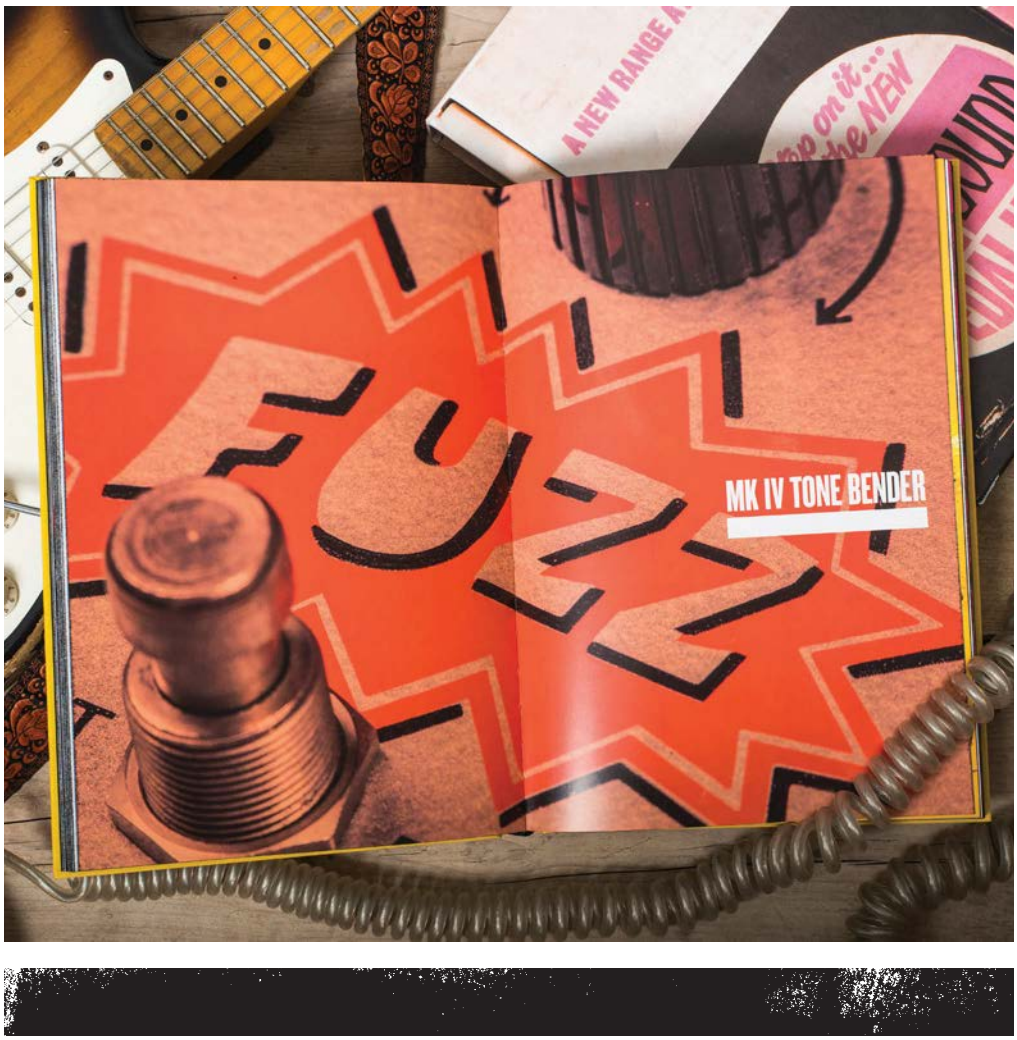
Looking back now it's nigh on impossible to comprehend just what this simple device signified.

Let's not forget, distortion was still viewed by the music business as a mistake. A fault to be rectified. But here we had the Tone Bender, whose sole purpose was to challenge that convention and encourage an entire generation to distort the normal.

DISTORTION WAS STILL VIEWED BY THE MUSIC BUSINESS AS A MISTAKE

You can imagine a lot of perplexed people puzzling over why anyone would go out of their way to create something which was, at heart, a loss in fidelity and recording quality.

Just 10 years earlier, in the 1950s, the record player had been revolutionary. You could now choose the music you wanted to play at home rather than rely on the



radio. The nation was coming out of the post-war austerity slump and teenagers were starting to break free from traditions and rules that had been so prevalent in previous generations. They wanted their own music, clothes and freedom. They collected seven-inch singles and LPs, attended art college and formed bands.

London was ground-zero for this whole scene. The Ealing Blues Club was the go-to place, spawning countless new bands and providing the bedrock for the future careers of many artists.

But, if you wanted to set up a band you needed equipment, right?

Well the growing affluence of the 1960s gave musicians an opportunity to get their hands on that equipment and start creating a new sound.

This made Macari's Musical Exchange the go-to destination of the time. Its central London location was helpful for session musicians making their way to studios and gigs, while young kids starting out in the capital and its surrounding areas had a place to go and look at these magnificent instruments.

The shiny electric guitars in the window no doubt created more than their fair share of daydreams of stardom. But once inside the shop there were plenty of dreamers asking about the iconic gold box and what it could do to their sound.

Imagine the staff plugging in the leads and demonstrating the MK I to potential buyers. It must have been like a bomb going off. That sound, the energy, the danger, the fuzz, THAT fuzz! It would have set those young creative minds into overdrive.

The Tone Bender arrived at the right place at the right time. It was costly and time-consuming to mail order a fuzz pedal from the US, but the arrival of the Tone Bender in Denmark Street made it easy for UK musicians to join the party.

PARTY TIME

And join the party they did, in their droves – in fact it's easier to list the bands who didn't use a Tone Bender than those that did. Had the Macaris anticipated the popularity? How could they? These were unchartered waters. The young ex-session player Jimmy Page, now with the Yardbirds, became the flag-bearer for that new sound. And as a favour to pal Jeff Beck, he picked him one up too so he could explore the sonic capabilities of the device.

Feedback became a big part of Beck's playing and *Heart Full Of Soul* made it to number two in the UK and number nine in the US.

Pete Townshend was seen at gigs stamping on a Tone Bender in-between singing about "My Generation" and creating some auto-destructive art. The Beatles were using the Tone Bender, too, with Paul McCartney making fine use of the fuzz on the *Rubber Soul* track *Think For Yourself*.

For a pedal company today to have even one of those artists on their roster of endorsees would be a dream come true. Back then Macari's had them all. How about Steve Winwood's huge sounding two-chord riff in the chorus of The Spencer Davis Group's *Keep On Running*? It became the first recording using the Tone Bender to go to number one in the UK.

Back in the US and the Rolling Stones topped the charts for four weeks in the summer of 1965 with *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. The three-note fuzz riff becoming THE sound the kids wanted to hear.

The British invasion of bands was now in full swing as UK artists took the sound of the American blues from Chicago and the Deep South back to the USA. But at the same time, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck were raising eyebrows among the blues purists back in the UK.

Beck appeared in the iconic Antonioni movie *Blow Up*, smashing his guitar. Shortly afterwards, he was fired from the Yardbirds, with Page taking over on lead guitar duties, but the pair remained close, and soon after reunited for a one-off single *Beck's Bolero*, with Keith Moon (heard shouting during the explosive introduction) on drums and John Paul Jones on bass.

SUMMER LOVING

As the Summer Of Love dawned, teenagers were running the show, and the Tone Bender continued to take its place at the feet of the world's guitar heroes. Pop culture up until this point was a dull grey affair but now the music, the clothes and, let's not forget, the drugs, were creating a multi-coloured universe for people to inhabit.

For the first time in history, music belonged to the young. Pink Floyd played all-night shows at UFO, and Syd Barrett was making use of the Tone Bender to add some more colour to the proceedings. The psychedelic underground was teeming with life.

Around that time, another act that had been on the scene for a number of years and regularly made use of Macari's was also conjuring up some magic of its own. The Pretty Things released *Defecting Grey* in November 1967. Like many records so ahead of its time, it failed to sell in any volumes, but listening to the track today, the riff is nothing short of epic. Guitarist Dick Taylor happily acknowledges it wouldn't have been possible without the Tone Bender.

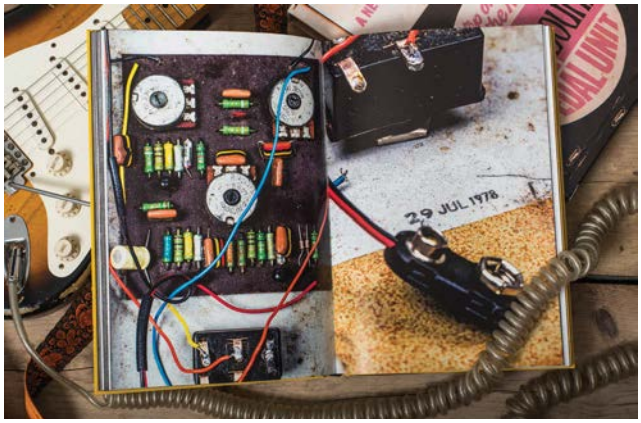
When you consider that the Second World War had only ended two decades earlier, it's easy to imagine parents hearing those primal blasts of fuzz coming from their children's bedrooms and being worried just what was going on up there. But a whole new language was evolving. These sounds we now take for granted as part of our musical heritage were new, nasty, dirty and, most importantly, dangerous. It was everything rock 'n' roll should be, and slap bang in the centre was the Tone Bender, providing that unmistakable sound.

THE TONE BENDER WAS MAKING ITS MARK ALL OVER THE WORLD

In various brands and guises, the Tone Bender was making its mark all over the world. For example, a Marshall Supa Fuzz made it out to Michigan's college town of Ann Arbour, where it ended up at the feet of none other than Ron Asheton. He was in a band with his brother, Scott, Dave Alexander and the astutely intelligent wild man James Osterberg, or Iggy Pop to his friends. Ron's first successful riff was for a fuzzy two-chord song called *1969*, which he had 'borrowed' from the middle of The Byrds' *Tribal Gathering*. The group's debut album *The Stooges* was a 33rpm advert for the Tone Bender. Fuzz-drenched and so far ahead of its time, it took until the arrival of punk just under 10 years later for it to be picked up as the classic it was.

LED-ING THE PACK

Meanwhile, back in the UK, The Yardbirds had become The New Yardbirds with John Bonham on drums, John Paul Jones on bass and Robert Plant on vocals. The band had started out playing Yardbirds songs, but it soon evolved into a new and rather different project requiring a new name. Led Zeppelin were born and Jimmy Page took the



electric guitar to new places on their eponymous debut album.

The band continued to tour heavily for the next few years following the release of *Led Zeppelin II*, which hit number one in the UK and the US. They were becoming the biggest band in the world.

The bands had evolved from using low-watt amplifiers to the 100-watt Marshall stacks that now dominated stages the world over. Led Zeppelin, for many, were as perfect a sound of the electric guitar as was possible combining a sweet tone with sustain, power and aggression. The Tone Bender was at the heart of that sound. Jimmy Page could have used other pedals, and as Anthony Macari said, "He would sound good using anything", but he chose the Tone Bender.

The close of the 1960s saw Mick Ronson transformed from guitarist extraordinaire to David Bowie's right-hand starman. The proto-metal sound of *She Shook Me Cold* took Bowie from pop wannabe to glam-rock superstar. The arrival of Ziggy Stardust would seal his fate as the biggest solo artist of the 1970s.

Mick's Tone Bender MK I (according to legend it was bought from Pete Townshend, although he has no recollection of this) and the 'Crybaby' wah (in the half-cocked position) would become synonymous with Bowie's music. The classic Bowie albums from that period have Ronson's stamp all over them. He would also scare parents up and down the nation when they appeared on *Top of The Pops* with their glam rock garb and Bowie's androgynous look.

Across the channel, Serge Gainsbourg was working on what would be his greatest and most influential album,1971's *Histoire de Melody Nelson*.

The band on the recording included Alan Parker on guitar (who had earlier played on numerous session tracks for artists including Hendrix and Donovan). His scorching guitar tracks played through a Tone Bender MK II added tension and power to the grooving orchestral rock sound.

Thinking about it now you wonder what the Macaris made of it all? You doubt they had time to stop and take in the remarkable journey their products had been involved in, both culturally and musically, and the enormity of the scene they had helped create. In just five years Macari's Musical Exchange saw their fuzz box leave the shop shelves to playing centre stage at a sold out Madison Square Gardens with Led Zeppelin – the biggest rock 'n' roll band on the planet.

Being at the centre of something often blinds you to the influence it is having on the wider world. Trying to run a business and provide for a family were no doubt larger concerns than Led Zeppelin's sell-out gigs, but you are left wondering if, even for a minute, the Macaris thought, "We did it"?

***Level & Attack The Untold Story Of The Tone Bender Fuzz* is available now for £75 from 11publishing.co.uk**

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES WESTWOOD

Could EarthQuaker's humble-looking new overdrive be the understated crunch machine your pedalboard has been dreaming of? Richard Purvis gets 'wood...

There are too many overdrive pedals and most of them sound more or less the same. Don't they? Well, you're certainly not short of choice, but the 'more or less' part is important – sometimes it's in these fine margins that greatness is defined. So yes, the Westwood is another low/medium-gain drive with minimal tone coloration… but if it sounds just teeny bit better than loads of others out there, that's big.

EarthQuaker planted a big old flag in Tube Screamer territory not so long ago with the excellent Palisades; but while this new unit is more TS-like in colour than that monochrome beast, it's heading somewhere slightly different in sound. We're promised amp-like overdrive with supreme purity here, and there's a twist in the EQ section, which is active: treble and bass can be cut or boosted, with a notch in the central 'flat' position. The treble control is working around 2kHz, bass around 80Hz.

Other than that, it's all pretty straightforward: the other controls are for drive and output level, it's true bypass, it runs on 9V mains power only, and is built in the USA.

IN USE

EarthQuaker plays an audacious game of one-upmanship by describing the Westwood as not just a transparent overdrive but a translucent one; and while we're not sure if that actually means anything different, first impressions are certainly positive. With drive set low and both tone controls notched off, our clean sound is fluffed up around the edges like the perfect roast potato. There's a slight softening of the midrange spikes, but the top and bottom ends of the EQ curve are pretty much intact.

This is about as touch-responsive as dirt pedals get, and whacking up the gain doesn't change that a lot… or make the crunch any less rich and valve-ish. The overall frequency response remains mostly neutral, but there's a sweetness to the mids that's hugely appealing and distinctly un-Screamer-like.

The EQ controls have been tailored to let you tame spiky single-coils, liven up woolly humbuckers, beef things up for some vintage 'whump', or simply fine-tune an already tasty tone to your liking. They handle all of this with aplomb, and are particularly good for keeping things tidy at higher gain levels – no worries here about flubbing out on that big chorus or ice-picking through everyone's earwax at solo time.

The tastefully squished attack and cool sensitivity of the Westwood make it as addictive as it is versatile, and in A/B tests with a whole bunch of other high-class overdrives – using a variety of guitars and amps – it has an uncanny knack of coming out on top for sheer likability. Don't dump all your other drive pedals just yet, but maybe translucent really is one up on transparent.

The squished attack and cool sensitivity of the Westwood make it as addictive as it is versatile

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

This is a massively crowded field of course, but here are three compact stompers that are widely considered classics of the genre: the **Paul Cochrane Timmy** ($129), **AnalogMan Prince Of Tone** ($138) and **Lovepedal Zendrive** (£185)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Wonderfully natural, subtly flattering overdrive
+ Compresses like a Screamer but without the EQ issues
+ Works well as a tweakable boost
– You want negatives? We'll have to get back to you...

Sweet, smooth and responsive, with a superbly effective tonestack: this is some sort of overdrive perfection

10/10

The Guitar Magazine AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

KEY FEATURES

EarthQuaker Devices Westwood

- **PRICE** £185
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Level, drive, bass, treble, bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** Active bass and treble controls with centre bypass notch; true bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 125 x 65 x 57mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 657 48228 **earthquakerdevices.com audiodistributiongroup.com**

Image: Joseph Supple

CURIOUS JEORGE

He's worked with Joe Bonamassa, Eric Johnson, Eddie Van Halen and the Jimi Hendrix estate and designed an effects pedal that spawned whole new genres of music. Not bad for an engineer who began his career as a self-confessed "pain in the ass" to the big boys. Chris Vinnicombe meets guitar effects guru Jeorge Tripps...

"I remember thinking, 'I wonder if in 20 or 30 years my shit will still be around, or if anyone will care!'" laughs Jeorge Tripps, founder of Way Huge Electronics, designer of the now-legendary Line 6 DL4 and the man responsible for some of the most exciting pedals ever to hit the mass market during his 12 years (and counting) at Dunlop Manufacturing. Today the California resident finds himself jet-lagged in snowy Birmingham as Dunlop's UK distributor Westside has organised a Q&A event in the city's impressively cavernous Guitar Guitar retail store.

We ask the affable Mr Tripps how his relationship with stompboxes began. "Literally accidentally!" he recalls. "I'm a guitar player, and I would noodle around with fixing stuff and whatnot. I moved to LA in 1991 and I had a copy of Craig Anderton's *Electronic Projects For Musicians* and broke it out again and just started messing with it, making pedals for fun. For a couple of years it was just really for fun and for friends.

"I was working in a place called Andy Brauer Studio Rentals and then I met Dave Friedman and ended up working for him and working on racks and building pedals and then somewhere in '94 I went, I'm just gonna build these pedals full time. People were wanting them and it seemed like a smart move, I guess! It was not like a planned thing, I was just fidgeting around reading books. So that was Way Huge, then in January 1999 I shut it all down and went to Line 6 and did seven years at Line 6 and then jumped to Dunlop and it's been 12 years at Dunlop now."

We wonder what it was like to be around at the dawn of the boutique pedal business. "People weren't really doing Big Muff clones or Tube Screamer clones back in 1995," says Tripps. "There was a handful of us. But everyone is a competitor now, and that's the internet. It's a different world. It's great, and it's hard. The guy who is building pedals in his garage because he put up an Instagram page... he's sold five and it doesn't seem like much but there's hundreds of those guys.

"When I first started the internet was around, but it was '95. People definitely weren't buying pedals often over the internet. The information wasn't there. Me and AnalogMan, Mike Piera, I've known him since the early 90s and we used to trade schematics via the mail. We might have talked via email briefly but most of it was letters and like, okay I'll trade you, I've got these cool Boss schematics and you've got all

Above **The Way Huge Mister Box is an overdrive pedal Jeorge hand-built with input from Michael Landau – only 10 were released worldwide**

those cool Electro-Harmonix ones. A lot of stuff on the web, I'd bet a lot of money it either came from me or him.

"Early on, you'd have to be nice to people! I'd call up Ibanez and get the local tech on the phone and be like, 'Hey, can I get a schematic for this or that?' Now you can't. I used to call up Dunlop and I would talk to Sam McRae, who's still there. He would send me Rotovibe schematics, MXR schematics... I still have faxes. I'd get faxes sometimes. Now they are all old and fading!

"It's different times. You can look like a really big pedal company. You can put together good social media and it can become a big pedal company 'cause all of a sudden you looked proper. It's totally different. I shut down Way Huge 'cause it was hard, and I got an offer to work on cool pedals at Line 6 with a team of people. It's not just me having to do everything and all I have to do is the fun part, dinking around and coming up with things? Making sure it sounds good? Great! I don't have to sell stuff or market it or build it? I was like, count me in."

MAKING HISTORY

At Line 6, Jeorge was responsible for all of the 4-series floor units, including the now legendary DL4 Delay, a stompbox so influential that music listening website Pitchfork recently referred to it as "the most important guitar pedal of the last 20 years" thanks to its use by a whole host of experimental musicians including members of Radiohead, Battles, Minus The Bear and countless others. Two decades on from its launch, the unmistakable green unit still helps create soundscapes on pedalboards the world over.

"It's pretty cool being part of that project and how pervasive it's been," acknowledges Tripps. "They still make it. Literally the only thing that I'm aware of that's changed, and that happened when I was still there, is the logo on the box. Which is great, I like that kind of stuff. You

Image: Joseph Supple

Image: Joseph Supple

"ALL I HAVE TO DO IS THE FUN PART, COMING UP WITH THINGS? GREAT!"

make it once, you make it right and walk away!"

Since moving to Dunlop, Tripps has not only designed such stage stalwarts as 2009's MXR Carbon Copy delay but he's also collaborated with a host of stars. We wonder how the translation process takes place between what the artist wants and the final result. "I think they all know what they want – it's their ability to articulate stuff," he explains. "I remember working with Satriani. Before he went to Korg, I worked with him at Dunlop. He was very articulate, it was great. He's like, 'I hear 1K' and I'm like, 'Oh, cool! I can figure that out!' Other people will be like, 'More purple!' That's really the trick, it's how well they can communicate and I how well I can understand."

"The Hendrix stuff was fun 'cause we can make Fuzz Faces. We went up to the Experience museum and looked at the Octavia they had. Van Halen's stuff was cool in that regard as well, it's like cool, you used stuff that we made, we're just going to make a special version for you. It would be great to work with someone like Jimmy Page, but I want what Jimmy Page used on Led Zeppelin II – 'You used a Tone Bender and that's what I want to see you use'. I'm kind of a purist."

How does a purist deal with modern safety legislation when it comes to designing new circuits? "You just don't use stuff that's problematic," he admits. "Using old parts... we just don't do it. Every now and again we do but we know

Above **Jeorge's smaller format Way Huge pedals are set to be a big deal in 2018**

Image: Joseph Supple

GO SMALL OR GO HOME

Tripps on the unique challenges of designing his new tiny Way Huge pedals

"The big change between the Smalls, as we call them, and the regular ones? The regular ones have relay true bypass and the Smalls go back to the original 3PDT mechanical switch 'cause the relay true bypass has extra circuitry and I have a lot less space! You could do that on some but on others there's no room. It kind of started with, 'How close together can I get these three jacks?' The input, the output and power. So I figured that out and then it's like, 'Let's put a box around it!'. The Smalls run on batteries, too.

"They all use surface mount – not completely, on the Russian Pickle it's a hybrid between the two. It's all surface mount resistors but the caps and transistors are through-hole. I wanted very specific ones for the sound. A surface mount resistor or a full-size resistor? It's still just a resistive element. Hey, we're tying low voltage. It's a resistor. But other than the switches and making them small, I didn't change any of the values in the circuit."

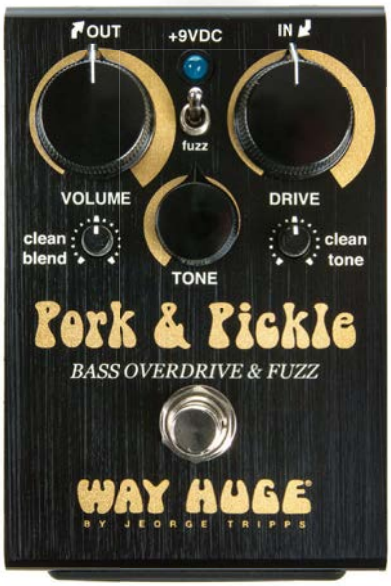
it'll be a pain in the ass. We'll have to strip lead off and it's always going to cost a lot more money. You go, 'Okay cool, I'm taking this old part, I've gotta go send it off to have lead taken off...' which inevitably means stuff breaks, so you send out 1,000 pieces and get 800 back. Great. The small companies can get away with it but we're too big of a target."

FAST-FORWARD

Although Jeorge is armed with a selection of new-for-2018 MXR and Dunlop pedals for tonight's event, we wonder if he's able to give us an insight into what's on his workbench back in Burbank. "What am I working on at the moment? I'm working on a nap!" he laughs. "We're tight-lipped about anything coming out. Usually I'm really far ahead. The stuff that's coming out now, the stuff I have to talk about, I'm like, shit... we're shipping this in a week and I forget how it works! It's like a band having to rehearse their new record because they've forgotten how to play it. Same kind of thing. I'm a year ahead, I'm kind of done with stuff for Summer NAMM so I'm thinking about January 2019 already."

Luckily Jeorge's rehearsals have paid off and he reels off a list of his latest designs to hit the streets. For 2018 the Way Huge mainman has been responsible for a series of pedals that are well, way smaller... "This year there was the MXR Sugar Drive, the 108 Classic Fuzz Mini – we just made it small because that old one was pedalboard-friendly when we did it probably eight years ago, but now people want tiny. I'm like yeah, shrink it!"

There's also the Sugar Drive, MXR's first klone: "The Sugar Drive



"I'M REALLY FAR AHEAD. THE STUFF THAT'S COMING OUT NOW, I FORGET HOW IT WORKS!"

is our version of the... mythical overdrive!" Jeorge grins. "You guys can say the name. We try not to be so blatant, but it blatantly is. Everyone else is doing it so I'm like, okay. With Way Huge I did a line of smaller series Blue Hippo, Aqua-Puss and Russian Pickle pedals.

"Then we did a Cry Baby Mini 535Q Wah and the Pork & Pickle, which is the first Way Huge bass overdrive, which literally is the Pork Loin and the Russian Pickle in one box. Bass players really like that and you can switch between the two but there's no cascading. Everyone was like, why not? And it's like, well, you'd have to have three more knobs so it would have to be bigger!"

As we prepare to make our way towards the arctic wasteland formerly known as the M5, we ask Jeorge how an effects designer who was at the bleeding edge of modelling technology in his Line 6 days feels about the recent wave of do-it-all digital rigs from the likes of Kemper and Fractal: "I'm not anti-modelling but the thing that has always driven me nuts is digital products that are deep," he says. "It's not that they are bad but if you walk up to an amp that has six knobs and you plug in, twiddle those six knobs for a few minutes and don't find anything you like, you're done."

"On a modeller, whether it's a Fractal or a Line 6 or a Boss or anybody... I've pitched people towards that stuff when they've been talking about a super-sophisticated rig that's got to have lots of controllers and things that break. But very rarely are you able to plug into that stuff and just play. You've gotta deep dive and learn how to use it. It's like getting a new cellphone – oh shit! I knew how to work this thing and now I'm starting all over...

"The beauty of the POD and the DL4 was that it was finite. But when you've got a display and you can go in deep... how many layers of this onion do I have to pull back until I'm happy? But for some people it's great. It depends what you are trying to do."

Opposite **The inside of Jeorge's ultra-limited Way Huge Mister Box prototype**

Above **The new Dunlop, MXR and Way Huge stompboxes that Jeorge designed for NAMM 2018**

BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
PRES
LEVEL BOOST
LEVEL
VOICE
DRIVE
DRIVE BOOST
SANTA ANA OVERDRIVE
BYPASS
BOOST
Fender
LEVEL
HI-FREQ
LOAD
LEVEL SET BUFFER
MUTE
Fender
REVERB TIME
DAMPING
PRE DELAY
TYPE
VARIATION
FILTER
LEVEL
MARINE LAYER REVERB
Fender
DEPTH
RATE
FEEDBACK
TIME
TYPE
DOTTED 1/8
VARIATION
LEVEL
MIRROR IMAGE DELAY
Fender
TONE A
GAIN A
TONE B
GAIN B
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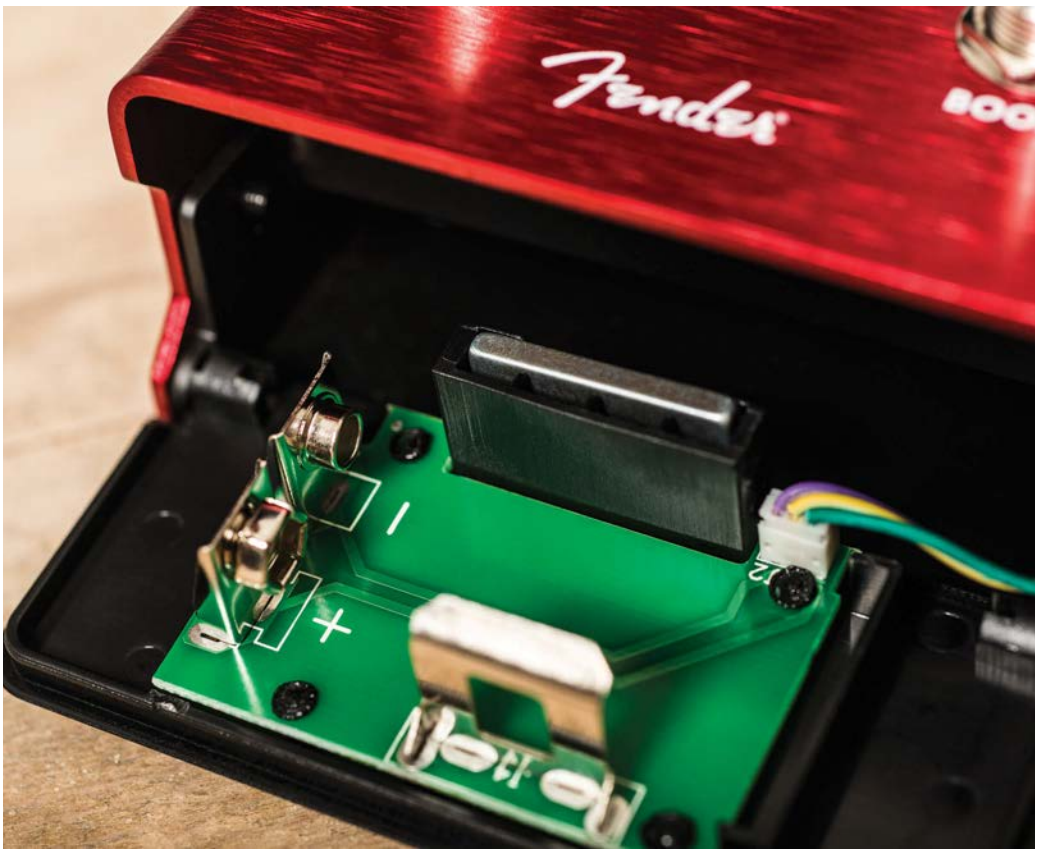

FENDER EFFECTS PEDALS

After decades of dabbling, Fender is making a proper go of the whole stompbox thing – but will these six new units floor the competition? Richard Purvis lines 'em up...

You may not realise it, but Fender has a long history in effects pedals. While there may have been more misses than hits since the amazing Fender Blender octave fuzz of the late 60s beloved of Billy Corgan of Smashing Pumpkins and Kevin Shields of My Bloody Valentine, it's notable that the company has hailed this new range as "marking its official entrance into the category".

What this really means is that Fender has finally decided to take stompboxes seriously. These are classy, understated pedals with some interesting features: sturdy aluminium construction, switchable LED position markers, offset inputs and outputs for snug pedalboard stacking, easy-access magnetic battery compartments… and, last but far from least, mass-market pricing. The effects chosen are equally sensible – dirt is handled by the Santa Ana Overdrive and the Pugilist Distortion, atmospherics are the preserve of the Mirror Image Delay and Marine Layer Reverb, while more utilitarian needs are taken care of by the Level Set Buffer and a compressor, The Bends. We've got all six here on test, so let's plug them in and see what the Big F has come up with.

These are classy, understated pedals with some interesting features under the hood

HANDS ON

We've set the six pedals up in conventional signal path order, which means the least sexy one's up first – the Level Set Buffer. Sorry. That being said, while giving your sound a bit of a push to overcome degradation through long cable runs is hardly a glamorous job, Fender has smuggled a couple of extra non-boring functions into this little silver box.

In fact, while most of us get by without a dedicated buffer, Fender's focus here is more on making it easier to maintain a tonal balance between different guitars in a live setting. So the level and hi-freq controls allow you to fine-tune your pickups' output before it hits your other, more exciting effects. There's also a second output for a tuner, which still works when the main one is muted.

Compressor pedals are another thing that many players can live without, but there's no denying that the smoothing effect of a good

one is flattering to a guitar's tone – especially if your playing dynamics are a little, ahem, unpredictable.

We're pleased to see that The Bends follows the current trend of letting you mix some of your untreated signal into the compressed tone. 'Drive' controls just how hard your sound is squished, and there's a 'recovery' knob for setting the release time.

Now we come to the colourful stuff – literally. The racer red Santa Ana is a FET-based overdrive with two switchable voices and a second footswitch that can be configured, via a little switch round the back, to boost either the gain or the output level. Tone-shaping comes from a three-way EQ section plus presence, and this is the only pedal of the six with selectable true or buffered bypass, thanks to another tiny slider switch.

reverb algorithms: two halls, two rooms and two 'specials' – both heavily modulated, and one of them with a shimmer option. You can dial in some pre-delay to keep the reverb from swamping your dry signal, and the combination of a filter switch and a damping knob offers plenty of control over the tonality of your moody ambiences.

IN USE

Right, let's start with some general impressions of the range before we pass judgement on the individual units. We like the flip-open battery compartments; we like the cute LED markers even more; but we're not so keen on the amp-style jewel lights, which are searingly bright and so close to the controls they can be seriously distracting.

These are weighty units and we're mostly impressed with the build quality, although the footswitches could be a weak spot: our Santa Ana Overdrive has the dreaded momentary dropout when you switch it on or off. That might not seem like a lot, but it can be a real issue when gigging, and we're hoping it's not a common problem.

> These are weighty units and we're impressed with the general build quality

If you think a pugilist is someone who breeds pugs, then the Pugilist distortion will soon send you scurrying to the nearest dictionary. This is a box of pure, hard-punching rock, the twist being that it has two separate channels that can be blended in parallel or stacked in series for maximum filth. Each channel has its own tone and gain controls, and there's also a bass boost switch. The other striking point to note about this unit is that it's barely half the price of the Santa Ana.

The two digital pedals in the series, the Mirror Image and Marine Layer, share an aquatic colour theme and, lurking by the mains input, both also sport a 'dry kill' switch for muting the original guitar signal. Each unit has three algorithms, available in two different flavours; in the case of the Mirror Image that means two straight digital delays, two warmed-up analogue types and two wobbly tape sounds. All six sounds can be modulated to taste – that's what the depth and rate controls are for – and you can add a dotted 1/8th to the standard 1/4-note repeats for trippy textures.

Finishing up the collection is the Marine Layer, which features six

So, on to the Level Set Buffer. Basically, it works. This is a simple and effective buffer for keeping your signal strong and clear through an assault course of true-bypass effects, and its mute function and tweakable top-end will take much of the hassle out of on-stage guitar swaps. It's a functional device, and we're not in love with it, but it could be a godsend for some. By the way, that little toggle switch changes the capacitive load seen by the pickups – but we couldn't really notice any discernible difference with most of our test guitars.

The Bends is an altogether more satisfying pedal to play around with… but again, the bottom line is that it does the job. With drive around halfway you can add a little fullness and sparkle to your clean tone without making it sound obviously compressed, and even at more aggressive settings there's no thumping on the flattened transients. Beyond three o'clock you might hear some jerky oddness as decaying notes bounce around the threshold, but this is easily softened by dialling in some of your uncompressed tone.

You could argue that Fender has already been making the finest dirt machines in the world since the 1950s – in the shape of its gloriously crunch-happy tweed amps. There are no 6V6s in the Santa Ana, though. Its core tone is full enough but with a distinct Marshall-like rasp, and perhaps better-suited to lead lines than chords. The two voices are strikingly different in terms of treble content, and the EQ controls and boost footswitch mean you can cover plenty of tonal ground with this box. Don't expect boutique smoothness, though.

The Pugilist is a simpler proposition: it's all about raw power. The two channels are broadly similar in character, but the ability to set them up with different gain and EQ levels then blend between the two means you can dial in just the right flavour of heavily saturated noise. A second footswitch for channel-hopping would have been nice, though, and the 'series' setting seems to offer less headroom, but without any more real ferocity.

In stark contrast, the Mirror Image Delay is all about space and sonic purity. The analogue and tape emulations sound superb, and the ability to control both rate and depth of the modulation means you can really tailor those atmospheric imperfections – and that's before you've even flicked on

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender's taking on the whole world with these units, but we haven't got room for the whole world so let's just list some of its biggest rivals in the mid-range compact pedal market: **Boss** (from £52), **Ibanez** (from £58), **MXR** (from £87) and **T-Rex Engineering** (from £99)

KEY FEATURES

Fender Level Set Buffer

- **DESCRIPTION** Adjustable buffer pedal. Made in China
- **PRICE** £87
- **CONTROLS** Level, hi-freq, load toggle switch, LEDs on/off
- **FEATURES** Always-on tuner output, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 79 x 64mm
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 0845 305 1122 **fender.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ A great EQ balancer for on-stage guitar-swappers
+ Off-line output lets you keep your tuner on all the time
+ A helpful booster if all your other pedals are true bypass

– You've managed without anything like this so far, right?

A niche product, but it's clever and could prove a genuine boon for some gigging players

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender The Bends

- **DESCRIPTION** Compressor pedal. Made in China
- **PRICE** £96
- **CONTROLS** Drive, recovery (release time), blend, level, LEDs on/off
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 79 x 64mm

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Nice natural compression that's effective but not intrusive
+ Lifts your sound, not your noise floor
+ Blend control lets you dial back in some dry signal

– Nasty throbbing when pushed too hard

A fine compressor that offers addictively sweet sounds at a competitive price

8/10

the dotted 1/8th for more complex, fluttery patterns. The only thing this pedal really lacks is the ability to go a bit mad: with delay level and feedback both maxed out, it's still doggedly tasteful.

That's a strong act for the Marine Layer Reverb to follow, but it's up to the job. Again we're talking about a hi-fi effect that scores highly for clarity, and again you're free to mess that up just as much as you like with the filter switch and damping control. The shimmer effect is more of a subtle texture than a full-on octave shriek, and that's probably for the best.

An impressive array of pedals, then – but the delay and reverb are our clear favourites. If we were forced to choose between the two? We'd probably grab both and eat Pot Noodles for a month.

KEY FEATURES
Fender Santa Ana Overdrive

- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal. Made in China
- **PRICE** £160
- **CONTROLS** Bass, middle, treble, presence, level, drive; switches for voice A/B, true/buffered bypass, boost level/drive, LEDs on/off
- **FEATURES** True or buffered bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 103 x 64mm

The Guitar VERDICT

+ Good low/medium-gain tones for lead playing
+ Dual-function boost footswitch is a clever touch

– It's not the cheapest drive pedal out there
– Our unit has a momentary drop out when switching on or off

A perfectly good overdrive with some useful features – but it feels a bit pricey

7/10

KEY FEATURES
Fender Pugilist Distortion

- **DESCRIPTION** Distortion pedal. Made in China
- **PRICE** £87
- **CONTROLS** Tone A, gain A, tone B, gain B, A/B blend, series/blend switch, bass boost switch, level, LEDs on/off
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 103 x 64mm

The Guitar VERDICT

+ Big, smooth, saturated distortion sounds
+ Two channels can be set up for very different tones

– Both channels in series doesn't add up to double the fun…
– …and it's a shame they're not footswitchable

It's not as versatile as it looks, but this is a lot of hard-rocking fun for under a ton

7/10

KEY FEATURES
Mirror Image Delay

- **DESCRIPTION** Digital delay pedal. Made in China
- **PRICE** £110
- **CONTROLS** Modulation depth, modulation rate, feedback, delay time, delay level; digital/analogue/tape mode, dotted 1/8 on/off, variation 1/2, dry kill on/off, LEDs on/off
- **FEATURES** Buffered bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127x103x64mm

The Guitar VERDICT

+ Good range of delay effects for the money
+ Analogue and tape emulations are impressively realistic
+ Great audio quality with little background hiss

– This isn't the sort of delay you can really go OTT with

Six really nice delays with tweakable modulation for this price is an excellent deal

9/10

KEY FEATURES
Marine Layer Reverb

- **DESCRIPTION** Digital reverb pedal. Made in China
- **PRICE** £110
- **CONTROLS** Reverb time, damping, pre-delay, level; hall/room/special mode, variation 1/2, filter on/off, dry kill on/off, LEDs on/off
- **FEATURES** Buffered bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 103 x 64mm

The Guitar VERDICT

+ As with the delay, lots of sounds per pound
+ Plenty of fine control over the tone of your 'verbs
+ The modulated stuff is especially immersive

– Pity there's no stereo option

A classy-sounding reverb with a feature set that's been smartly chosen for maximum versatility

9/10

Builder **Profile**

STONE DEAF

UK company Stone Deaf Effects & Amplification builds innovative stompboxes that have graced the boards of some of the biggest stars in rock. Main man Luke Hilton explains tells the story of the firm's rapid growth and idiosyncratic designs...

Luke Hilton (left, if you hadn't already realised) is the director of Stone Deaf Efffects – the company he founded in 2009. Stone Deaf hand-builds all of its effects in the company's workshop in Huddersfield, UK

Q When did you first get into effects pedals?
"I first got into collecting pedals around 2008. Started off with Boss, then got a Subdecay Flying Tomato, which was a great pedal. Then got some D*A*M Pedals before they became really popular and then an old Coloursound, and an original Way Huge."

Q How did that grow into making pedals for yourself?
"The collecting led me to see gaps in the market. One was in active EQ, and I had an original Maestro pedal as used by Josh Homme at the time. This was designed by Bob Moog in the 1970s and was called the MPF-1. I thought it was a wonderful pedal but too large and over-engineered. So, I went online, found the schematic, reverse engineered it and had it made using local suppliers to make Stone Deaf's first pedal, the PDF-1."

> People don't want an overdrive that just sounds the same as the one they already have

Q Was it just a straight clone of that Maestro pedal? How has that changed with your revamped PDF-2?
"Yeah, the PDF-1 is a direct copy of the MPF-1 but with component improvements, lower noise floor and smaller footprint. Some of the PDF-1s are quite sought after now, and we still mod them occasionally for expression control, as some didn't have it at first. The expression and gain controls came in with the PDF-2. Although the PDF-2 does sound slightly different, it can still do the sounds of the PDF-1, but with expression control, a gain control pot and footswitchable channels – all of which customers wanted – as well as a lower price."

Q What are your favourite pedals you've built?
"My personal favourite is the Warp Drive and the Tremotron, and the new delay we have coming out. I like all of them, because I spent hours doing listening tests to make sure all of our pedals when on the same pedalboard wouldn't sound the same! The Tremotron is in mine and many other guitarists' opinion the best analogue square wave tremolo on the market, and it's all made in the UK. The Syncopy, which is the new delay, sounds great and also does vibe and chorus tones with its in-built modulation and one second of analogue delay. The Warp Drive is brutal, and again is the most responsive high-gain pedal I've ever played, and has the best noise gate we've come across in such a pedal."

Q What makes Stone Deaf pedals different to other boutique boxes out there?
"We're different because not one of our products is the same as each other – we cleverly design to reduce cost but to also incorporate individual features to each product. People don't want to buy an overdrive in a different colour that just sounds the same as the one they already have. We also incorporate digital control, and this is going to play a large part in our future. It will allow the guitarists to be able to recall a huge palette of textures and tones at a given moment but still retain the analogue sweetness of the tone. We're reasonably priced when you consider the R&D we do on our products, as well as the fact that they are made in the UK. You're supporting UK manufacturing!"

Q The graphics that you use on your pedals are very distinctive – who does those?

"We had previously used other artists and I had done the artwork on the PDF-1 when we first launched the brand. It always had an identity with the brand name but not the look of the brand. A guy called Matthew or commonly known as 'McBess' purchased the first PDF-1 off me and later we became friends. I was working with an illustrator and it didn't work out as how I had envisioned so I spoke to Matt one day and he agreed to help. He's super talented and created this visual style that's sort of *Steamboat Willie*-esque, but with a satirical demeanour."

Q Your pedals have been used by the likes of Josh Homme, Simon Neil and others – how did that come about?

"Right place, right time, right product! I met Josh Homme at Leeds Festival and I am a huge QOTSA fan. I'd also gigged previously with Biffy Clyro in Manchester as a support band on their first EP and toilet tour, so I'd spoken to Simon at Leeds and he remembered me. The Chili Peppers just bought some stuff off me. I met a guy in a pub who was friends with Duff McKagan, and he got some stuff off me. I got an e-mail off Nick Valensi of the Strokes asking to buy some PDF-1s and Fig Fumbs. I gave Fall Out Boy some pedals as I was back stage at Download, and Joe Trohman was such a nice guy and we hung out briefly. All a lot of luck and charm to be honest!"

Q How has that big-name artist association helped build the Stone Deaf brand?

"It has helped us grow our business and Josh Homme is a god when it comes to tone. He knows his sound and how to get it – and his set-up is fascinating. I think people are really interested in how the songs they love are created, and artists are fascinated by the equipment other musicians use, too."

Q What's next for Stone Deaf?

"I wish I could give you an insight in new releases in the future, but we have the Syncopy coming out soon and this is going to be a flagship analogue delay with one-second worth of BBDs and ability to act like a chorus and vibe pedal. For other stuff people just need to go to our Facebook and Instagram pages to keep their finger on the pulse."

For more information on Stone Deaf Effects & Amplification, visit stonedeaffx.com

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES DATA CORRUPTER

This analogue synth pedal threatens to brutalise your signal in all sorts of peculiar ways... Richard Purvis braves the atonal underworld

KEY FEATURES

EarthQuaker Devices Data Corrupter

- **PRICE** £225
- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue harmoniser pedal with modulation. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Square wave, subharmonic, oscillator and master output levels; 8-way subharmonic selector with unison/oscillator root switch, 8-way oscillator selector with 3-way octave switch, modulator glide/vibrato switch and rate control; bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** True bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (not included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 147x120x57mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 657 48 228 **earthquakerdevices.com** **audiodistributiongroup.com**

We're not sure if EarthQuaker Devices still counts as a 'boutique' builder – its pedal empire seems to be steadily expanding in scale as well as reputation – but they're still all made in Akron, Ohio, the 'rubber capital of the world' that also gave us Devo, Chrissie Hynde and the Black Keys.

You can usually rely on EarthQuaker's stuff to be slick, classy and imaginative… but for this one we might have to give slick and classy the afternoon off. The Data Corrupter is a modulating, harmonising synthesiser built around a phase-locked loop (PLL) – a kind of circuit that, in a very loose nutshell, uses maths to generate new frequencies.

For those of us faced with making sense of the pedal's controls, the three small white dials at the top are the key. These are for blending between three very different sonic elements: a fuzzy square wave, a subharmonic and an oscillating signal, the latter two at selectable intervals from the note you're playing. If that sounds like a nice three-part harmoniser with a bit of distortion and some added synthy wobbles… well, it very much isn't. The word 'Corrupter' is your clue that what comes out of this thing is much more chaotic than that.

IN USE

It'd be nice to start out our testing process with something fairly straight and then bring in the lunacy bit by bit… but that's easier said than done with this thing. The only relatively non-barmy sound comes from cranking the square wave and setting the other two mix controls to zero; this creates a fat, boopy fuzz tone that looks set to sustain forever until the input signal falls below a certain level and everything is suddenly gated out with a crackly splutter. Adding some subharmonic to this sound at a simple interval (five of the eight options are octaves or fifths) adds some more interest, and it's worth noting straight away that the tracking is impressively accurate – no latency, no dropouts.

Now we bring in the oscillator, and are confronted by a choice between two very different flavours of chaos. In 'glide' mode our third element behaves something like an old-school analogue synth set up to play lead lines through a sweeping, sinewy filter; in vibrato mode the effect is much more siren-like, and absolutely nothing like a guitar.

The Data Corrupter might soon begin to feel like the sort of pedal that you'll have half an hour of bonkers fun with… then pop back in its box for a decade or two. Put some work into exploring how the controls and switches interact, however, and you'll find its skillset does run a little deeper than that. It's just a pity that EarthQuaker didn't put a few sample settings in the manual to stop dabblers getting discouraged, as there's real depth here.

> The word 'Corrupter' is your clue that what comes out of this thing gets much more chaotic

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

We had a lot of fun turning guitar sounds into lo-fi synth mayhem with the **Meris Ottobit Jr** (£318), and the **Alexander Syntax Error** (£199) promises similar kinds of signal-mangling; if you fancy more melodious synth-like textures, try the **EHX Superego** (£195)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Sonic strangeness of the very highest order
+ More versatile than it might at first seem
+ Sounds great on bass
– The oscillator can get annoying very quickly

It sounds more like a faulty analogue synth than a guitar effects pedal, but that's fine by us – a highly entertaining and feature-packed noise generator

8/10

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STONE DEAF

EFFECTS & AMPLIFICATION

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